St. Louis

20 JULY 23

A-LIST AWARDS

THE BEST THE REGION HAS TO OFFER, AS CHOSEN BY READERS AND EDITORS

DINING, ARTS, SHOPPING, WELLNESS, SPORTS, ENTERTAINMENT, AND MORE

INCLUDING

Nikki Glaser

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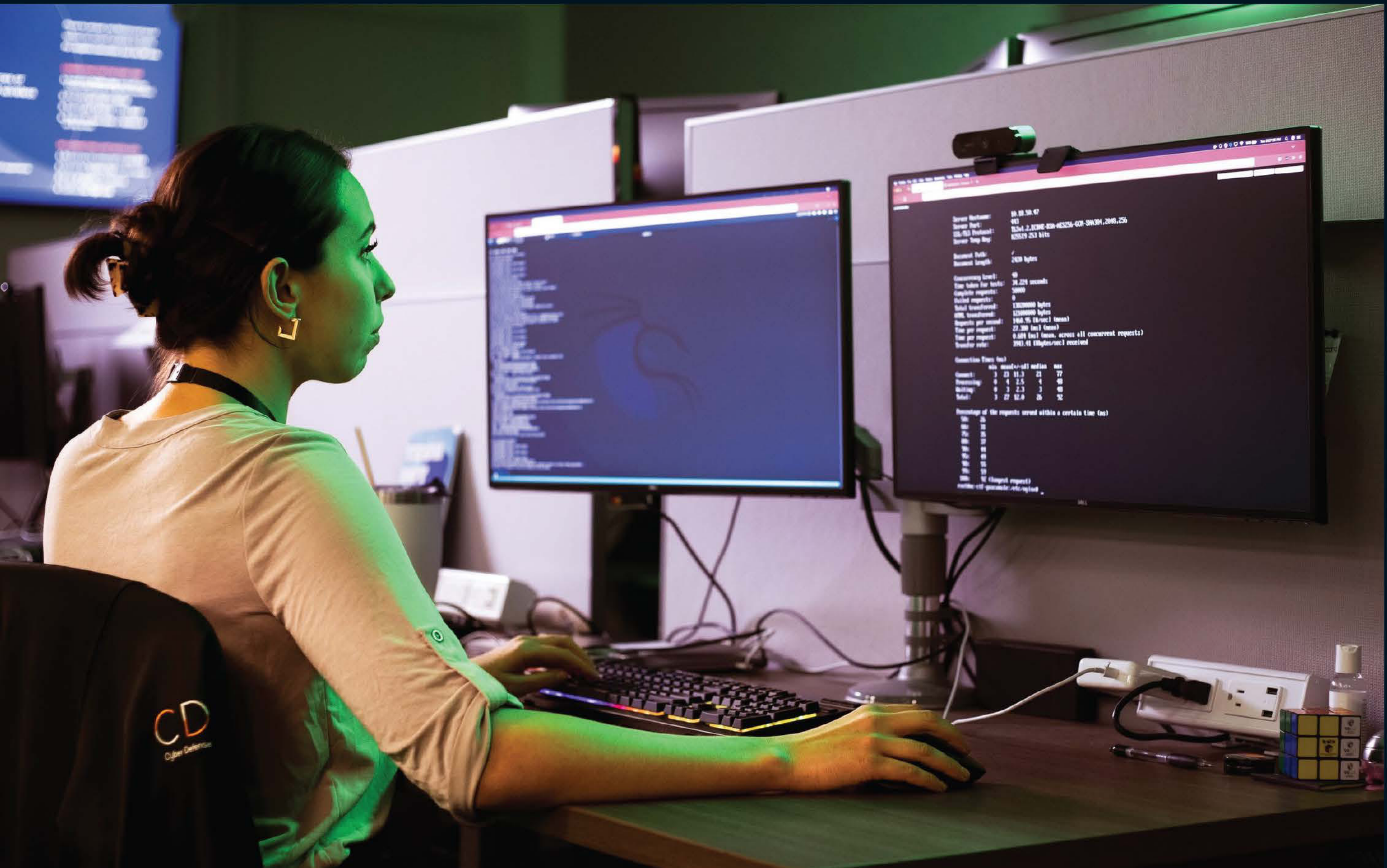
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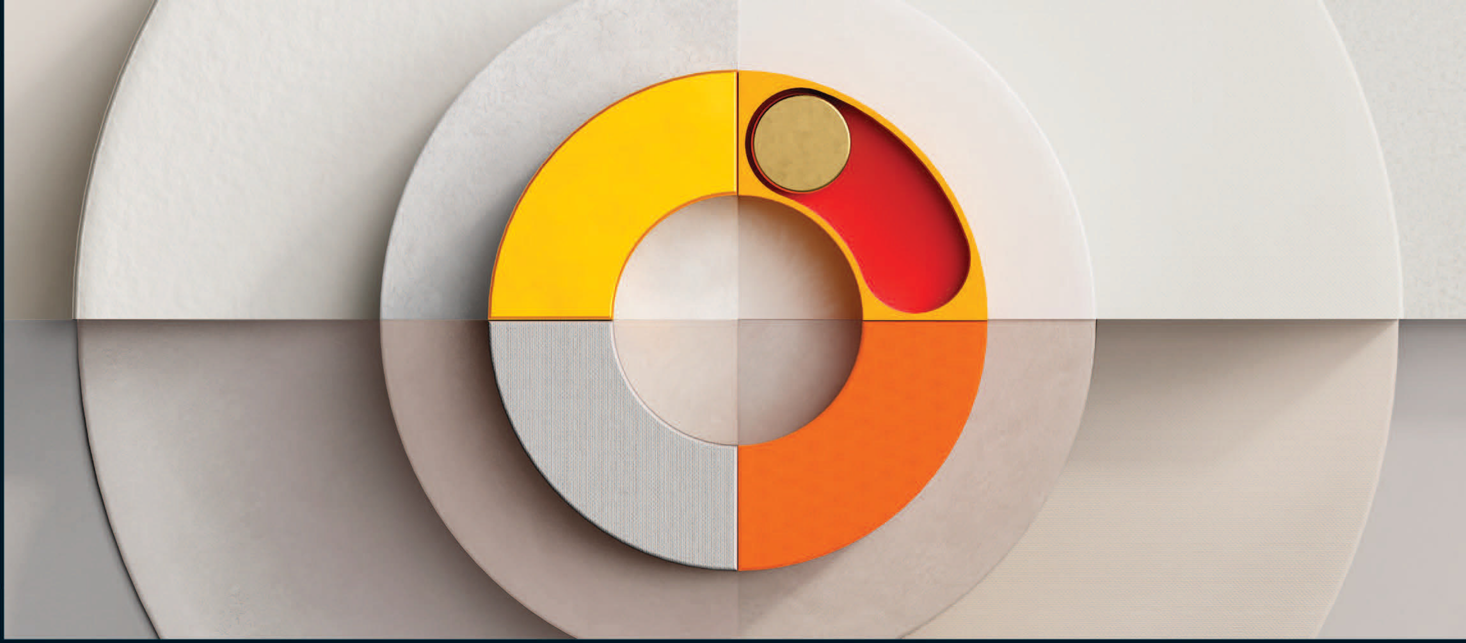

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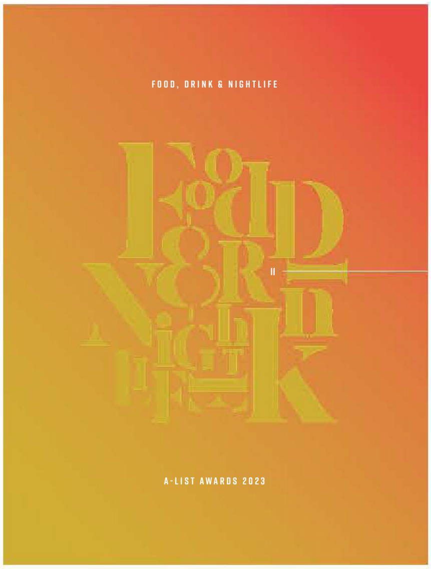
VOLUME 29 / ISSUE 7

A-LIST AWARDS

THE REGION'S BEST IN DINING, ARTS, SHOPPING, STARTUPS, SPORTS, ENTERTAINMENT & MORE

By Cheryl Baehr, Bill Burge, Amy De La Hunt, Pat Eby, Holly Fann, Max Havey, Christine Jackson, Dave Lowry, George Mahe, Melissa Meinzer, Jarrett Medlin, Gaby Mendoza, Mike Miller, Charlene Oldham, Nicholas Phillips, Katie Powers, Collin Preciado, Arianna Sergio, Grace Snelling, Lynn Venhaus, Amanda Woytus, and Abby Wuellner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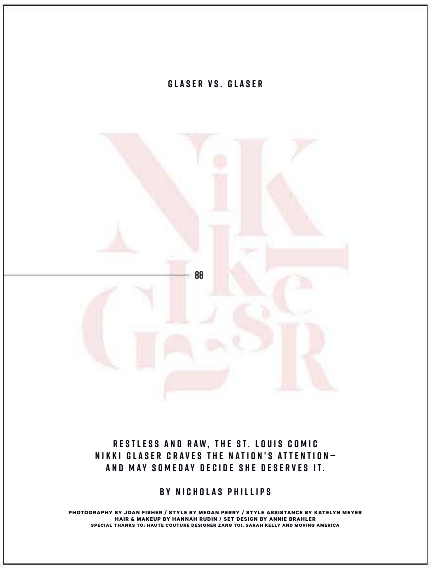
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RESTLESS AND RAW, THE ST. LOUIS COMIC NIKKI GLASER CRAVES THE NATION'S ATTENTION— AND MAY SOMEDAY DECIDE SHE DESERVES IT.

BY NICHOLAS PHILLIPS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOAN FISHER / STYLE BY MEGAN PERRY / STYLE ASSISTANCE BY KATELYN MEYER
HAIR & MAKEUP BY HANNAH RUDIN / SET DESIGN BY ANNIE BRAHLER
SPECIAL THANKS TO: HAUTE COUTURE DESIGNER ZANG TOI, SARAH KELLY AND MOVING AMERICA

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Styling by Megan Perry
Hair & Makeup by Hannah Rudin
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What's on your A-List ?

"Our animals who have bigger personalities than most people do. Like Murphy, the bald eagle at World Bird Sanctuary who tried tirelessly to hatch a rock and then adopted an orphaned eaglet. (As one person on Twitter said, 'He's not the stepdad; he's the dad who stepped up.')"
—Amanda Woytus, Deputy Editor

"The Annex in Webster Groves. Their covered patio is my summertime second office, and I always go home with some fabulous treat from the market."
—Christine Jackson, Managing Editor

"The growing list of nonalcoholic options and mocktails that bars and restaurants have added to their menus as of late. My personal favorites, so far, have been the creative mocktails at 801 Local."
—Emily Wells, Art Director

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Subscription Rates: $19.95 for one year. Call for foreign subscription rates. Frequency: Monthly. Single Copies in Office: $5.46. Back Issues: $7.50 by mail (prepaid). Copyright 2023 by St. Louis Magazine LLC. All rights are reserved. Reproduction in part or whole is strictly prohibited without the express written permission of the publisher. Unsolicited manuscripts may be submitted but must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

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VOLUME 29 / ISSUE 7

IT'S BEEN A long, strange road to get here. Just ask comedian Nikki Glaser (p. 33). "In 2020, my career was at an all-time high. And then the pandemic hit," she explained in the first episode of her E! reality show *Welcome Home Nikki Glaser?* "So I did what any successful comedian at the pinnacle of her career would do: I moved back to my hometown of St. Louis."

In this issue, senior editor Nicholas Phillips provides an in-depth look at Glaser (p. 88), who's appeared on a host of other TV shows and specials (*FBOY Island*, *The Masked Singer*, *RuPaul's Drag Race, Good Clean Filth*), toured the U.S., and performed at Stifel Theatre on New Year's Eve. She's also become somewhat of a spokesperson for the city. In a spot for Explore St. Louis, she touts favorite spots (the Central West End, Forest Park, City Museum, to name a few) and notes, "The architecture, the landscape, the different neighborhoods… All the hidden gems reveal themselves to you."

And there's no shortage of them, with the list growing longer each year, regardless of the challenges that came with COVID-19. As we noted in summer 2020, shortly after the onset of the pandemic, "We decided to move forward with the annual awards because they recognize local businesses and people who provide experiences, services, and support you can't find anywhere else. They exemplify not only what's outstanding about our region but also how we can work toward a brighter future."

Consider, for instance, Brandi Artis (p. 17), who introduced not only 4Hens Creole Kitchen at City Foundry STL last year, but also opened Simply Delicious, a restaurant serving from-scratch dishes downtown. That's just the beginning, though, Artis hints. "This girl is not nearly finished dreaming or achieving," she told *SLM*. "I'm just getting started."

Likewise, other St. Louisans have ambitious plans, from small businesses to large-scale change (p. 86). At the International Institute of St. Louis, Moji Sidiqi is welcoming Afghan refugees. Rung for Women is providing critical support, such as training for geospatial and tech jobs. And BJC HealthCare and Midwest BankCentre are investing in the community in significant ways.

Along those lines, perhaps no endeavor has received more fanfare during the past year than the addition of St. Louis CITY SC. The club's state-of-the-art facilities have transformed Downtown West and fueled additional investment nearby. And St. Louis remains at the heart of its mission, from the music (courtesy Mvstermind) to the food (overseen by acclaimed restaurateur Gerard Craft) to the art installation outside the stadium (artist Damon Davis' *Pillars of the Valley*, which pays homage to Mill Creek Valley and the residents who once lived there). It's in large part thanks to the Taylor family and Carolyn Kindle (p. 84), who's at the helm of the first women-led ownership group in Major League Soccer and aspires to "put St. Louis back on the international map."

Like Glaser, she's doing just that by shining a light on the city.

Standup Act

A graduate of the prestigious Savannah College of Art & Design, photographer **Joan Fisher** photographed comedian Nikki Glaser for this month's cover feature.

Fashion & Beyond

Photographer **Miranda Munguia**'s photo subjects have ranged from fashion to fine art, events to products. This month, she photographed a range of A-List Award honorees.

Full Plate

Writer **Amy De La Hunt** has written for a range of local publications, in addition to working with Parents as Teachers and education communications agency SW/PR. She regularly contributes to *SLM*'s online dining coverage, as well as this month's A-List dining section.

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FOOD, DRINK & NIGHTLIFE

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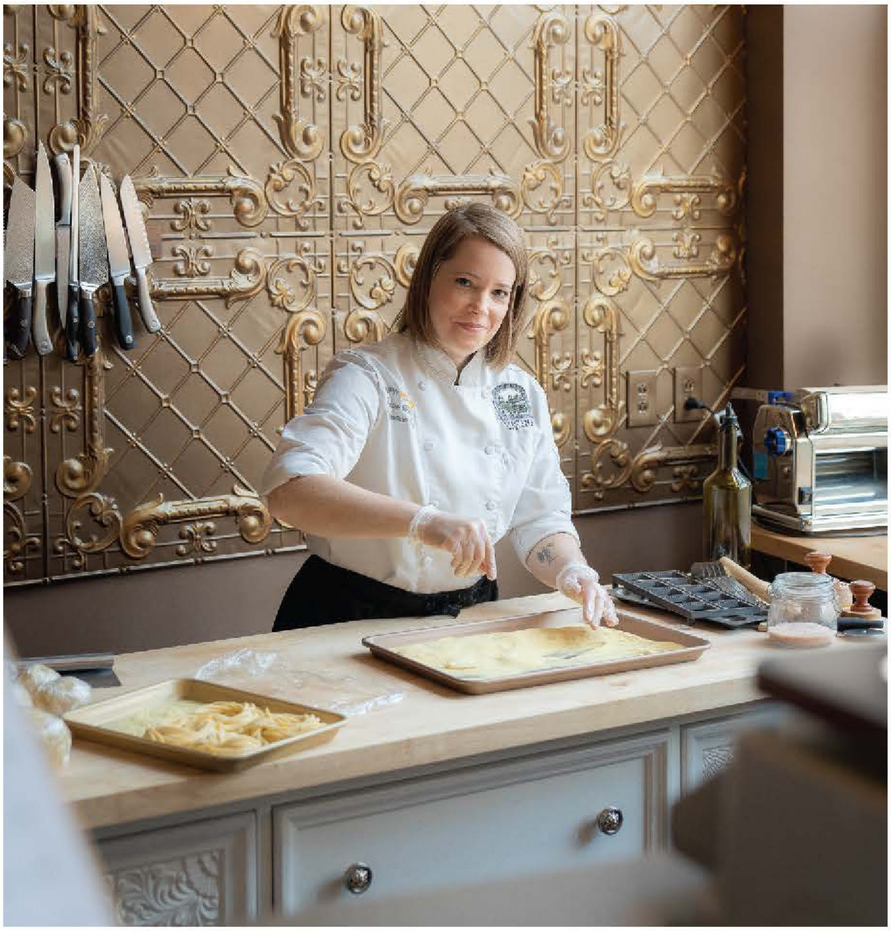
A-LIST AWARDS 2023



BEST PLACE TO BE CHARMED

Vicini Pastaria

When chef and owner Dawn Wilson went to Tuscany to study Italian cooking, she fell in love not only with the food but also with the country's slow-paced, communal approach to eating. Her tiny Lafayette Square charmer is the embodiment of that ethos. *vicinipastaria.com.*

BEST NEW LISTENING SPOT

The Saturn Lounge

Named after the Saturn-like rings that run around a vinyl record, The Saturn Lounge is stocked with cold drinks and vinyl records. With more than three decades of DJ experience at KDHX, Doug Morgan (aka Doug Love) programs the evening's soundtrack, drawing from the more than 20,000 records that make up his personal collection. *thesaturnlounge.com.*

BEST PIZZA PAIRING

1929 Pizza & Wine

Sure, pizza and wine are a quintessential pair, but the real match at 1929 Pizza & Wine is husband-and-wife team Matt and Amy Herren, who have married their respective baking and chef backgrounds to create a lovely Neapolitan pizzeria in downtown Wood River, Illinois. *1929pizzaandwine.com.*

BEST FOOD & MOOD

Rock Star Tacos

With its neon-lit, rock-star-themed interior, Rock Star Tacos at The Gaslight has created the perfect atmosphere to enjoy its eccentrically tasty fare. Created and cooked by ex-rocker Wil Pelly, the tacos further declare the vibe of the joint with such monikers as the Amy Swinehouse and the Shrimp Bizkit. *rockstartacos.com.*

BEST BOTTLE SHOP & MORE

Grand Spirits Bottle Co.

Passersby might see Grand Spirits as a lovely boutique wine shop at first blush—and it is. But walk through its doors, and you see that Grand Spirits is so much more. Mezcal tastings, delectable sandwich counter Grand Sammies & Sides, and experimental cocktail bar New Society pack so much firepower under one roof, you wonder how it's even possible. *grandspiritsco.com.*

BEST SUCCESSOR

Salve Osteria

Natasha Bahrami could have simply carried on her family's legacy at the erstwhile Café Natasha's, but instead—with husband Michael Fricker and chef Matt Wynn by her side—she forged her own with this excellent Italian-inflected restaurant. *salveosteria.com.*

Photography by **Kevin A. Roberts**

NEW MEXICAN/LATIN RESTAURANTS

Once upon a time, St. Louis' Mexican dining landscape consisted of little more than the chimichangas and pre-mixed margaritas popularized by Tex-Mex spots. While there's a time and place for such an experience, what's been thrilling to watch in recent years has been the rise of regional Mexican culinary offerings, which offer a more comprehensive view of the country's varied food traditions. Restaurants such as **Sabroso Cocina Mexicana**, with its outrageously delicious cochinita pibil, celebrate the Yucatan in vibrant fashion. **Taqueria Morita** is a love song to a chef's family road trips down the Baja coast and all of the tiny roadside taco stands that they frequented along the way. At **La Oaxaqueña**, a Oaxacan-born chef connects with her late mother through her family's recipes, including some of the best *mole* you can get in the bistate area, and **Ladue Taco** is a venue for a longtime employee of Companion to finally show off the street tacos that are so popular in his hometown of Michoacán. Even the places that lean Tex-Mex have bucked the standard playbook to reveal their own unique touches, whether that's pineapple-stuffed fajitas at **Los Arcos** or traditional Mexican grilled meats at **Sal y Limón**. The broader Central American region is represented by places such as **Sueño Latino**, which serves not only as a culinary refuge for the city's Honduran diaspora but also as a way to introduce St. Louis diners to the Central American country's rich traditions, including its excellent tamales. Together, these restaurants create a stunning tapestry that captures the culinary vibrancy of Mexico and beyond.

BEST PRE-MATCH MEAL

Kain Tayo

The offerings inside CITYPARK may be impressive, but they can't outshine the outstanding food just down the road at Kain Tayo, where co-owner Sally Arcega's fiercely traditional dishes, such as sisig, chicken adobo, and lumpia, offer a transportive, delicious window into Filipino cuisine. *kaintayostl.com*.

BEST NEW STREET FOOD

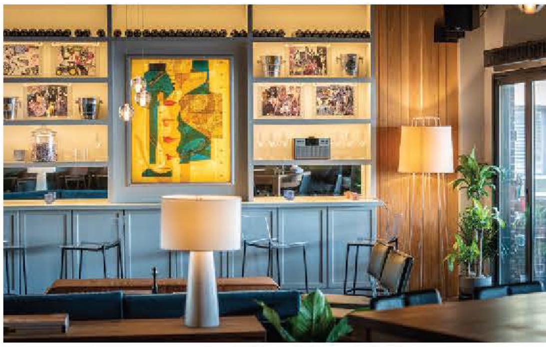
Salsa Rosada

Groove to the Latin flavors at Salsa Rosada, Mandy Estrella and Bradley Payne's lunch-only, Venezuelan-Colombian, Midtown follow-up to Mayo Ketchup. Check out tequeños, cheese-filled pastries often paired with sweet guava paste. Try Venezuelan arepas or pastelitos, second cousins to empanadas, packed with meats and cheeses. And for a sweet ending, little doughnuts with sweet fillings called bombas from Pan Pa' Ti Artisan Bakery really are da bomb. *plantaingirl.com*.

BEST SPINOFF

Maryland House

Kevin Brennan wanted to build Maryland House as an extension of the current Brennan's. What he ended up creating is a stunning restaurant, lounge, and majestic terrace that feels like it captures the Central West End in all of its stylish, cosmopolitan glory. *themarylandhouse.com*.



BEST TARTINES

Ivy

For those who prefer more than peanut butter on their toast, there's no better menu than Ivy Café's in Clayton. The European ambiance has earned it a following. The tartines (French for "toast") are topped with everything from jam to jumbo shrimp, and they have new faithful fans returning time and again. *ivytartines.com*.

Photography by **Kevin A. Roberts**

SPINOFF CONCEPTS

Some of St. Louis' best bites come from new concepts in existing spaces—or mini spinoffs in new neighborhoods. Steve's Hot Dogs ventured into grilled-cheese territory from the comfort of its own kitchen with **Steve's Meltdown**, a gourmet grilled-cheese ghost kitchen sandwich shop. At pop-up **What the Cluck?**, Cassy Vires presents a limited menu of "fried chicken reimagined," available weekends only at Baileys' Range's downtown location. **A Little Hi** and **Eat Crow** stand alone, with menus reflective of their esteemed parentage. The former offers access to Hi Pointe Drive-In's greatest hits in Ballwin, while the latter serves up drinks from The Crow's Nest menu in Soulard. And **Kingside Express**, the limited-seating restaurant in the Delmar Loop from the creators of Kingside Diner, focuses on carryout and delivery for its signature hash browns, slingers, and croissant breakfast sandwich.

RETRO-INSPIRED BAR

Tim's Chrome Bar

Vintage neon lights the way to a vividly reimagined cocktail lounge in Bevo Mill. It's a throwback to whatever era you're nostalgic for, from *The Brady Bunch* to Wham! Eat updated classics such as deviled eggs and pizza rolls from Corelle plates that seem straight out of your aunt's cupboard while drinking punch and playing bingo or jamming to live bands. *timschromebar.com.*

GOLDEN TOUCH

Kabul Express STL

The relocated restaurant serves up Afghan food with flair in a convivial atmosphere with shareable dishes, such as classic mantu, sambosas, and naan with roasted eggplant or yogurt. The menu offers wraps filled with grilled meats, vegetarian and vegan offerings, as well as plates. Order kabobs, chop, or lamb shank plain—or crusted with edible gold leaf. *facebook.com/Kabulexpressstl.*

BEST LATE-NIGHT EATS

Up Late STL

The shift away from late-night happy hours has made way for the moonlight to shine on Up Late's small-by-design menu (two breakfast sandwiches, a taco, and doughnuts), available inside World's Fair Donuts. Perhaps we needed a quirky nocturnal restaurant to make it sound appealing to add jam to a bacon, egg, and cheese sandwich. *uplatestl.com.*

BEST SPECIALTY PIZZA

Jalisco Pizza

Leo Ortiz adds slow-cooked birria beef to a traditional cheese pizza garnished with fresh cilantro and onion, and serves it with a flavorful consommé. The signature pizza tastes like Mom's pot roast with fresh Mexican flavors, layered on a thin, buttery crust. The best-selling combo draws customers from all corners of the metro area to a strip mall in St. Charles' New Town. *jaliscopizza.com.*

BEST BRUNCH

Casa Don Alfonso + Hatch'd

At **Casa Don Alfonso**, the buffet brunch offerings go on and on like it's Easter Sunday, except the culinary works of art are displayed every Saturday and Sunday morning. **Hatch'd**, with its kitschy neighborhood vibe, brings its plated A game, luring diners to try one of the signature omelets or build one of their own. *casadonalfonso.com, hatchdstl.com.*

BAGEL BONANZA

When the renowned Bagel Factory closed late last year and left a huge hole in the local bagel market, three New York–style bagel shops opened to fill St. Louisans' cravings. In Webster Groves, **Bagel Union** (an offshoot of Union Loafers, one of the most celebrated bread bakeries in town) turns out superior iterations with bagel sandwiches to match. When **Lefty's Bagels** opened in Creve Coeur, it took the owners weeks to meet the unexpectedly high demand. And at **C&B Boiled Bagels** in Wood River, Illinois, owners Matt and Amy Herren's pedigree includes a handful of prior successes: 1929 Pizza and Wine, 222 Artisan Bakery, Goshen Coffee, and the erstwhile Fond in Edwardsville.

FRIED CHICKEN CORDON BLEU

Bistro La Floraison

It's a savory Tootsie Pop–like creation. The outside's an exquisitely fried chicken breast. Cut into its succulent center, and out spills a glossy flow of melted Gruyère studded with smoked bacon. The whole thing sits in a pool of aromatic moutarde d'Orleans. On a menu full of excellent bistro dishes, this one stands out. *bistrolafloraisan.com.*

BEST LATE-NIGHT EATS

Westchester

Whether barhopping or bingo-playing, sometimes things run late. Chesterfield's Westchester beckons. It serves up dinner until 11 p.m., so you can drop in for a bowl of French onion soup with a Chardonnay or a burger and a glass of Cab Sav. Isn't later-night dining lovely? *westchesterstl.com.*

BEST CHINESE SOUL FOOD

Kitchen 95

Hakka cuisine's a regional joy of Chinese cooking—simple dishes with minimal preparation. Here, the Hakka Stir Fry (made with dried squid, pork, dry tofu, and celery) sounds basic, but the transportive tastes and textures are the essence of "home-style" eating. *kitchen8895.com.*

Photography by **Kevin A. Roberts, Wesley Law**

THE DREAM TEAM

Mike Risk

CHEF

At some point in the past 30 years, Mike Risk has likely made you a memorable meal, the type you immediately recall the next day and continue to bring up in conversations throughout the week. It may have been early in Risk's career—maybe the prime rib, lapping in jus, at Sam's Steakhouse in the '90s. Or you may have enjoyed one of his meals during the decade that he was rolling pasta and enriching lobster risotto at Trattoria Marcella. Or you might have had that meal at Olive + Oak, where Risk first worked with his future wife, chef Jesse Mendica, and was making food that "was just magic," as he puts it. Or maybe it was at O+O Pizza, where he made the grilled octopus corzetti (imbued with bone marrow, red wine, thyme, and leeks) or agnolotti (with burrata, blistered snap peas, fennel, and a garlic pink peppercorn butter). Somehow, his dishes seem to welcome you with open arms, like spring itself. *oohosp.com*

Brandi Artis

OWNER

Brandi Artis had known success as a singer, a nanny, and a diamond seller before attending culinary school and starting a catering company, which ultimately led her to open two St. Louis restaurants. At 4Hens Creole Kitchen at City Foundry STL, the bestseller is shrimp and grits. Downtown, Simply Delicious celebrates amped-up versions of the comforting dishes of Artis' youth, such as the croffle (croissant cooked in a waffle iron). On the drawing board are plans for a dual concept (La Chica Bonita Street Eats and The Owl Lounge); cooking classes and dinners held at soon-to-open Artis Wellness Center (owned by Artis and her wife-partner, Brittany Artis); and an appearance on this season's *The Great Food Truck Race* (operating the 4 Hens food truck), which debuts on Food Network on June 18. "This girl is not nearly finished dreaming or achieving," she says. "I'm just getting started." *4henscreolekitchen.com*

Pat Gioia

BARTENDER

At times, you wonder if Pat Gioia has a clone—or perhaps a twin or three. It's the only explanation for how this bartending utility player is able to be in so many places—and be so many things to so many people—at once. As beverage director of STL Barkeep, Gioia is known not only for offering delicious mobile cocktails but also for having a keen understanding of what each particular crowd and venue entails. His bartending style is that of a chameleon, adapting his drinks to different environments, whether a summertime sipper for Shakespeare in the Park, a holiday-inspired libation at Garden Glow, or an easy-drinking cocktail at Tower Grove Farmers' Market. Now, with STL Barkeep's new permanent space, The Vandy, Gioia is able to showcase an even wider range, unbridled from the limitations of a mobile bar. That means more ingredients, space, and tools to unleash his considerable cocktail creativity. *stlbarkeep.com*

Hya van der Pedden

CHEF/BARTENDER

The pandemic whopped many hospitality workers, but Planter's House's boxing bartender, Hya van der Pedden, punched back—with panache. She started Hya Made, a monthly food pickup to share home-cooked Korean foods. She'd already earned cred with drink introductions at Planter's House that riffed on Korean flavors, such as Where the Hell's the Whiskey? ("People in Korea often drink a sweet potato latte," she says, which inspired a similar cocktail concoction.) To experience Hya Made food, follow her on Instagram, where she posts monthly menus. Place orders by noon on Sunday to pick up the food on Monday evenings at Planter's House. You'll even find a Hya-made surprise inside. "I picked up a $5 origami book at Aldi's and taught myself to fold," she says. "I put a piece of origami in with each order to give everyone a little something extra." *instagram.com/hya.made*

Daisy Hudspeth

SERVER

Daisy Hudspeth, who worked at the erstwhile Café Natasha, is now at another top establishment, Wright's Tavern. Poise, confidence, grace, ability to read the table—all are evident. "She's able to be with the guest in that moment," Wright's Tavern owner Matt McGuire says. "She's a star." (Coincidentally, her brother, Haley Riley, is the chef/pitmaster/co-owner at Salt + Smoke.) Hudspeth is focused, listens to guests, and can pick up on what isn't being said. Natasha Bahrami (the namesake of Café Natasha) says, "Daisy leans in, she listens, observes, and asks questions in order to optimize the guest experience." McGuire puts it another way: "People with a tremendous amount of empathy make great servers. Daisy checks that box, too." Bahrami adds, "Sometimes, I have to tell a server to take special care of such and such table. With Daisy, that happens automatically." *wrightswydown.com*

BEST NEW SOCCER BAR

The Pitch Athletic Club & Tavern

Situated catty-corner from CITYPARK, The Pitch is perpetually packed on match days. When it opened, LHM's Steve O'Loughlin described the scene as "Las Vegas sports bar vibe, with high design and high energy, while at the same time being comfortable and nostalgic." With the memorable atmosphere and menu, it does just that. *thepitch-stl.com.*

BEST REINVENTION

Nobu's

After moving the longtime Japanese restaurant from Olivette to the Delmar Loop, skilled sushi chef Noboru Kidera soldiers on in an 18-seat contemporary space. He's assisted by his son, George, and wife, Taeko. No surprise that the omakase experience is one of the toughest reservations in town. *nobustl.com.*

BEST REBOOT

Humphrey's Restaurant & Tavern

Saint Louis University students past and present rejoiced when the Midtown staple reopened last November, five years after temporarily closing its doors. The renovated restaurant pays homage to its history, with a similar layout, some favorite dishes, and, yes, penny pitchers and birthday plunger shots on occasion. *3700 Laclede.*

LIVE MUSIC-MEETS-MICROWINERY

City Winery

When City Winery founder Michael Dorf decided to expand City Winery to a midsize city, he returned to the place where he attended college and found an ideal space at burgeoning City Foundry STL. Dorf, who also founded the Knitting Factory in New York and has produced tribute concerts to a host of music legends, has created a space that somehow manages to house live music, a winery, and a restaurant under one roof. We'll toast to that. *citywinery.com.*

BEST ADDITION

Bonito Bar

Cradled between Frida's and Diego's Cantina, the small but stunning Bonito Bar was inspired by the pet parrot of artists Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, the restaurants' namesakes. The focal point is a 14-foot vaulted ceiling finished in gold leaf, from which hang clear glass birds and one brightly colored one: Bonito. *eatatfridas.com.*

NEW WINE BARS

While St. Louis will always be a beer town, the metro area's suddenly overflowing with wine bars as well. Consider **Winnie's Wine Bar**, the latest concept from Paul and Wendy Hamilton. Sharing a building with Hamilton's Urban Steakhouse & Bourbon Bar in Lafayette Square, the concept's all about flight, from the retro aviation theme to the drink menu's wine flights. Farther south, on Cherokee Street, **'ssippi** specializes in natural wines and offers a wine club, rotating by-the-glass options, and bottles. Likewise, in Webster Groves, **Clover** wine bar offers a selection of natural wines on Thursday through Saturday nights. In the Central West End, **Black Mountain Wine House** provides an ideal spot to grab a drink before shows at the Gaslight Theater. Farther west, at **The Wine Café** on historic Main Street in St. Charles, Tiara and Terrence Curry offer a curated list of wines, along with charcuterie boards, sandwiches, and more. And in the Metro East, at **Grüv Bistro & Wine Bar** in Belleville, drinks are poured once again in the space that previously housed The Wine Tap.

Photography by **Kevin A. Roberts**

BEST FOLLOW-UP RESTAURANT

Sado

After multiple James Beard Award semifinalist nods for indo, chef Nick Bognar has brought avant-garde techniques (dry-aging fish and cooking over super-hot Japanese charcoal) to Sado on The Hill. The menu includes both expensive, hard-to-source items and more affordable basics (crab rangoon, shrimp tempura, California rolls), so everyone feels welcome. *sado-stl.com.*

BEST JAPANESE BENTO OUTLET

Katsuya

Rarely is a Japanese specialty captured so accurately—and deliciously—as at a cool little place where breaded cutlets and pickled vegetables are served bento-style, with rice and a daube of virulent mustard to spice things up. *katsuyastl.com.*

BEST IDEA

Rosé by Peno's Amuse Bouche

At Pepe Kehm's latest restaurant every guest is welcomed with a mini-course: hot and cold soup, tapenade and crisps, avocado with hearts of palm, Roquefort pâté, goat cheese on puff pastry... It's a nod to hospitality and a civilized way to spark the palate for outstanding coastal French and Italian cuisine. *rosestl.com.*

BEST SPIN ON PIZZA

Press

After working at the prestigious Blue Hill at Stone Barns in New York, Logan Ely came to St. Louis and quickly earned a reputation for his clever, creative dishes at Square 1 Project, Shift, and The Lucky Accomplice. So naturally, when he decided to put his own spin on pizza, he came up with something unexpected: 10-inch pressed pies that are somewhere between pizza and calzone, made with local ingredients. Enjoy a stuffed pizza with a craft cocktail in the 32-seat space in Fox Park. *press-stl.com.*

HIDDEN GEMS

Find a seat at **La Tiendita** *tortillaria* at lunchtime, and you'll soon see why it's so popular with those who know Mexican fare. Fresh tortillas roll off a machine, and puffy *gorditas* are stuffed with meats or hominy-thick *pozole* served hot. Enjoy a taste of Little Kingston in St. Peters on Friday nights at **Main Street Diner,** which transforms into an outpost of Jamaican favorites, complete with aromatic jerk, oxtail stew, pigeon peas, and rice. At **Maaji's Street Kitchen**, tucked inside a strip mall in St. Ann, to-go dishes—masalas, curries, and samosas—are served from a tiny counter. (Tip: Warm *paranthas* can "burrito-fy" meals that make for delightful picnics.) And "filling up" takes on a new, unexpected meaning at **Olivette Station** in Olivette. Along with gas, you can purchase freshly broasted chicken, along with waffles, or enjoy a meal of Punjabi classics: chickpea curry, chicken tikka, and samosas.

BEST PLACE TO SPOIL YOURSELF

La Patisserie Chouquette

After just two bites of the delicacies that accompany afternoon tea, you'll understand why this Botanical Heights shop recently earned a James Beard Award nomination for Outstanding Bakery. Reservations go fast, even at $50 per person. A second-best option: Pre-order a tea to go. You'll miss the exceptional service but still savor the scones, cakes, tartlets, and more. *simonefaure.com*.

BEST USE OF PLANTAINS

Maize & Wheat's Canoa de Maduro

Plantains are often served as a side on Latin American menus, either smashed and fried while still green (savory tostones) or ripened and caramelized (sweet maduros). These "canoes" are the best of both versions: ripe plantains cooked whole and stuffed with shredded beef, chicken, or Colombian bocadillo (seasoned ground meat), all topped with melted cheese. *maizeandwheat.com*.

BEST CRAB CAKE

Wright's Tavern

Getting your full Abe Froman on at this swank-tabulous place demands you commence dinner with the most extravagant crab cakes this side of Baltimore. These CD-size bad boys have just enough breading to keep the crab from crawling off. They have a golden crust, an aroma like the sea, and an intense crabbiness. Spectacular. *wrightswydown.com*.

BASQUE CHEESECAKE

Bar Moro

From that glorious caramelized crust to that last creamy spoonful, this San Sebastian specialty redefines "cheesecake." Imagine a firm custard hidden under a crackly skin of roasted sugar. At this new, beautiful exemplar of Iberian cuisine, the dish is a classic way to finish dinner in a Spanish mode. *bengelina.com/bar-moro*.

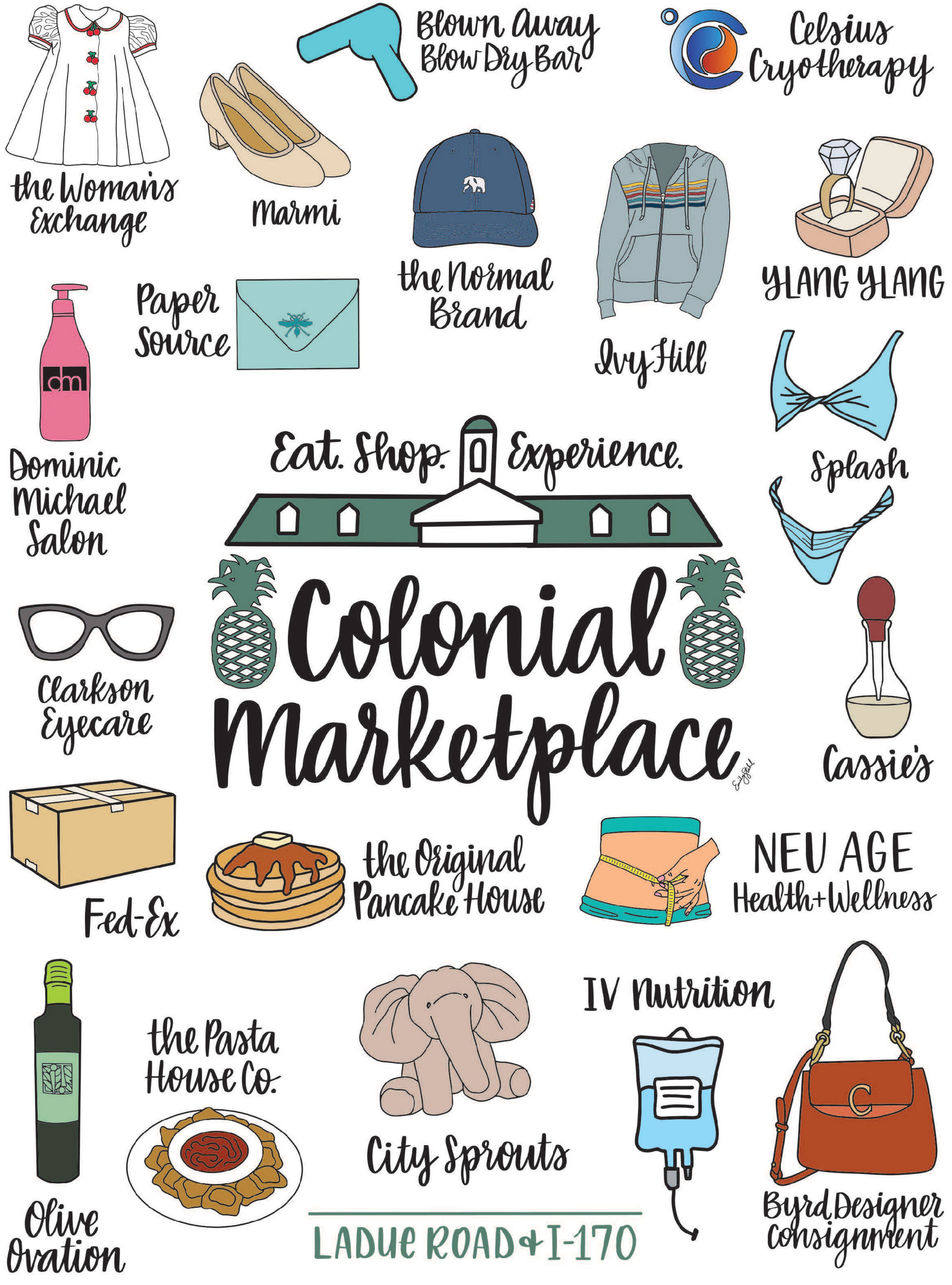
BEST VEGAN TACOS

Terror Tacos

The taco names—Double Diablo, Carnage Asada, Cowboy from Hell, Deathwish—sum up the horror-metal vibe at this South Grand vegan Mexican eatery and bar. But what keeps people lining up is the execution (pun intended) of the proteins, including house-made seasoned seitan and tofu grilled with cilantro and lime. (Pro tip: Terrorize any taco by wrapping it in a corn shell with extra-spicy sauce.) *terrortacos.com*.

Terror
G.D.
Mezcal
Pura
COCKTAILS

Photography by **Kevin A. Roberts**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Celsius Cryotherapy
the Normal Brand
Ivy Hill
YLANG YLANG
Paper Source
Dominic Michael Salon
dm
Splash
Eat. Shop. Experience.
Colonial Marketplace
Clarkson Eyecare
Cassie's
Fed-Ex
the Original Pancake House
NEU AGE Health+Wellness
IV Nutrition
Olive Ovation
the Pasta House Co.
City Sprouts
Byrd Designer Consignment
LADUE ROAD & I-170

BEST BURGER

Hi-Pointe Drive-In

The burger is exactly what you'd expect from an old-fashioned, drive-in-style eatery: crispy, greasy, and served on a toasted bun. The ingredients—grass-fed, grain-finished beef and only the freshest of fixings—make Hi-Pointe a standout. *hipointedrivein.com.*

FINALISTS

Mac's Local Eats / Stacked STL

BEST BAKERY

Missouri Baking Co.

The longtime bakery on The Hill is known for its Italian treats. The best thing on the menu: the chocolate drops—think doughnut meets muffie. (Remember, it's cash and check only.) *2027 Edwards.*

FINALISTS

Federhofer's Bakery

Nathaniel Reid Bakery

BEST BREAKFAST

The Shack

Indulge your inner child (or the actual child at your table) by ordering the s'mores waffle. After all, nothing can go wrong after adding Golden Grahams, marshmallows, and chocolate sauce to a pile of carbs, right? *eatatshack.com.*

FINALISTS

First Watch

Southwest Diner

BEST BAR

Syberg's

Famous for its signature award-winning wings and half-pound burgers, the family-owned chain also offers friendly service, somehow finding a way to stand apart from a crowded sports bar field. *sybergs.com.*

FINALISTS

Mascots Bar & Grill

Narwhal's Crafted

BEST TAKEOUT

JP's Hideout Pub & Grill

After learning the restaurant ropes from his father, John and Melissa Windfeldt's restaurant in Cottleville serves a wide selection of American fare: brined chicken wings, T-ravs, and more. *jpshideoutpubandgrill.com.*

FINALISTS

Chicken Coop

Loaded Elevated Nachos

BEST BARBECUE

Sugarfire Smoke House

With 14 locations, Sugarfire has found a formula to success: Pretty much everything on the menu is worth trying. The sauces are also particularly noteworthy—try the coffee barbecue sauce and the Carolina mustard. *sugarfiresmokehouse.com.*

FINALISTS

Pappy's Smokehouse

Salt + Smoke

BEST BRUNCH

The Shack

The inventive menu-item names are enough to make you want to order everything. Regulars will tell you that it's all good, but the skillets and loaded hash will cure what ails you and keep you coming back. *eatatshack.com.*

FINALISTS

Russell's on Macklind

Twisted Tavern

BEST CHEF

Nathan Hatch

After more than a decade at Trattoria Marcella, Hatch continues to impress with his leadership and creativity. Among his recent creations: a stuffed bowtie pasta. *3600 Watson.*

FINALISTS

Tyler Layton, Twisted Tree Steakhouse

Chloe Yates, Cellar House

Photography by **Kevin A. Roberts**

BEST CHINESE RESTAURANT

Mai Lee

It's technically more than a Chinese restaurant. If you're going for traditional Chinese fare, then you can't go wrong with the egg rolls and moo shu pork. And if you're wading into the Vietnamese side of the menu, be sure to try the pho. *maileestl.com*.

FINALISTS

China King

Corner 17

BEST CHOCOLATIER

Crown Candy Kitchen

Mark your calendar now for next spring, when Crown Candy will again start selling its popular chocolate bunnies. After that—or any other time of the year—it's worth the trip for its other candy (chocolates, clusters, caramels, and more). *crowncandykitchen.net*.

FINALISTS

Bissinger's

Chocolate Chocolate Chocolate

BEST CUPCAKES

Jilly's Cupcake Bar & Café

A cupcake from Jilly's is every child's fantasy come true. A cupcake large enough to make your eyes pop, stuffed and topped with all the fluff and sprinkles to send you back for seconds. *jillyscupcakebar.com*.

FINALISTS

The Cup

Sugar & Slice Bakery on Main

BEST DESSERTS

Russell's on Macklind

While Russell's is known for its gooey butter cake, don't leave without a slice of the other cakes. Even if you typically avoid coconut, the coconut cake might make you a believer. *macklind.russelscafe.com*.

FINALISTS

Sugar & Slice Bakery on Main

SugarBot Creamery

BEST COCKTAIL

Narwhal's Crafted

Enjoy a taste of beachfront property without leaving the Midwest with a craft cocktail reincarnated as a slushie. Can't decide between the guava margarita and elderberry gin fizz? Sample both—or add a third and make it a flight. *narwhalscrafted.com*.

FINALISTS

Cellar House

Planter's House

BEST DOUGHNUTS

Old Town Donuts

Old Town is well-known, despite the fact that its two locations (in Florissant and Cottleville) require a drive for some St. Louisans. Three shifts per day ensure the doughnuts are always fresh and worth the trip (though good luck making it home with a full box). *oldtowndonuts.com*.

FINALISTS

Donut Drive-In

Donut Stop

BEST DISTILLERY

Stumpy's Spirits Distillery

Based on an eighth-generation family farm near Columbia, Illinois, Adam and Laura Stump's distillery is among the few farm distilleries in the nation that grows, harvests, and uses its own grain in the production process. The result: a quality product with truly local roots. *stumpysspirits.com*.

FINALISTS

Square One Brewery & Distillery

StilL 630

BEST COFFEEHOUSE

Kaldi's Coffee

A cappuccino at Kaldi's in Kirkwood will have the same ratio of foam to milk as Kaldi's in Atlanta. Such precision, along with its rich signature roast, has earned the coffeehouse a reputation for consistent—and consistently good—coffee. *kaldiscoffee.com*.

FINALISTS

Exit 11 Coffee

Rendezvous Cafe & Wine Bar

BEST FARMERS' MARKET

Soulard Farmers' Market

It's hard to beat a market that's been in business for nearly 200 years. Although the scene has evolved over the decades, Soulard Farmers' Market remains consistent in the range of its vendors and quality of its products. *730 Carroll*.

FINALISTS

Kirkwood Farmers' Market

Tower Grove Farmers' Market

BEST GREEK RESTAURANT

Spiro's

Spiro's does the classic Greek dishes well, and it pours a mean cucumber martini. The Chesterfield restaurant kicks it up a notch with an incredible patio. *spiros-restaurant.com*.

FINALISTS

Michael's Bar and Grill

Olympia Kebob House & Taverna

BEST FOOD TRUCK

Truck Norris

Besides the clever name, Todd Norris' food truck offers a mash-up of a menu: mac 'n cheese grilled cheese, El Guapo Street Taco Melt, BLT sushi... The brand lives up to its tagline: "comforts and classics with a twist." *trucknorrisstl.com*.

FINALISTS

Narwhal's Crafted

T-Birds Tacos, Phillys, and More

BEST PATIO

Billy G's Kirkwood

With an expansive patio that offers comfortable seating, umbrellas and cabanas, and twinkling lights in the heart of downtown Kirkwood, alfresco dining at Billy G's is ideal for getting together with family and friends. *billygskirkwood.com.*

FINALISTS

Arzola's Fajitas + Margaritas
John D. McGurk's Irish Pub and Garden

BEST ROOFTOP DINING

Three Sixty

Perched atop the Hilton St. Louis at the Ballpark, Three Sixty provides one of the city's most memorable views, eye level with the top of the Arch and overlooking Busch Stadium. It's hard to beat cocktails and small plates on the rooftop at sunset. *360-stl.com.*

FINALISTS

The Frisco Barroom
Moonrise Hotel

BEST STEAKHOUSE

Tucker's Place

With three area locations, Tucker's Place isn't your typical steakhouse. You won't find white tablecloths, fancy suits, and eye-popping prices. Instead, you'll find a cozy atmosphere with some of the metro area's most affordable chops and happy-hour deals. *tuckersplace.com.*

FINALISTS

Sam's Steakhouse
Twisted Tree Steakhouse

BEST LIQUOR OR WINE STORE

Total Wine & More

The nation's largest independent retailer of fine wine offers more than 8,000 wines and 3,000 spirits. *totalwine.com.*

FINALISTS

ABV Barrel Shop
Randall's Wine & Spirits

BEST PIZZA (NON-ST. LOUIS-STYLE)

Dewey's Pizza

While waiting for their pizzas, families flock to the kitchen windows to see the dough tossed, the flour float through the air, and the toppings sprinkled on top. The resulting pies—from seasonal specials (Citrus & Beet, Tito Santana) to specialty pizzas (Bronx Bomber, Edgar Allen Poe)—are worth the wait. *deweyspizza.com.*

FINALISTS

Katie's Pizza and Pasta Osteria / Mellow Mushroom

BEST ITALIAN RESTAURANT

Favazza's on the Hill

The place is steeped in history and memories. The Favazza family has been serving up authentic Italian fare to St. Louisans for 45 years, and the 300-seat restaurant on The Hill is situated in the same building that once housed Ruggeri's, where the Rat Pack dined and a young Yogi Berra worked as server. *favazzas.com.*

FINALISTS

Liliana's Italian Kitchen
Trattoria Marcella

BEST LATIN RESTAURANT

Mayo Ketchup

Mandy Estrella and Bradley Payne's restaurant brings the spirit and passion of Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba to Lafayette Square. (Try the Picadera Sampler for a taste of the menu.) And check out Salsa Rosada, the new companion restaurant to Mayo Ketchup, in Midtown. *plantaingirl.com.*

FINALISTS

Asador Del Sur
TANGO Argentina Food

Photography by **Kevin A. Roberts**

BEST WINGS

Syberg's

The wings themselves are jumbo-size and made from chicken that's hormone- and antibiotic-free. Up the ante with a host of sauces, from Sweet Heat to the extra-hot Suicide, teriyaki to trashed, or try the new Red Hot Riplets dry rub. *sybergs.com.*

FINALISTS

Joey B's Food & Drink

Mascots

BEST THAI RESTAURANT

King and I

A longtime staple along South Grand, the Thai restaurant is moving to the former Blaze Pizza space in The Crossings at Richmond Heights. Although the modern atmosphere may be different, customers can still find the same home-style dishes and regional specialties from central, northern, and southern Thailand. *kingandistl.com.*

FINALISTS

Pad Thai STL

Thai Kitchen

BEST VEGETARIAN/VEGAN RESTAURANT

Terror Tacos

Brothers Bradley Roach and Brian Roash combined some of their favorite things—tacos, vegan food, horror movies, and heavy metal—to create one of the most memorable restaurant concepts around. The theme's even reflected in the dishes, with such vegan options as the Double Diablo Taco, the Tofu Terror Taco, and the Carnage Asada Taco. *terrortacos.com.*

FINALISTS

Pizza Head

SweetArt

BEST BREWERY

4 Hands Brewing Co.

Whether it's the food in the tasting room (provided by Peacemaker Lobster & Crab) or the seasonal beers (often developed in partnership with local businesses), 4 Hands shines while highlighting the best of St. Louis. *4handsbrewery.com.*

FINALISTS

Schlafly Beer

Urban Chestnut Brewing Company

BEST SUSHI/JAPANESE RESTAURANT

Sushi Ai

When it opened in 2010, Sushi Ai made waves for its all-you-can-eat sushi offerings. Prefer a more traditional approach? There's also à la carte sushi and sashimi options, bento dinners, yakisoba, and more. And in case you're wondering, the name is a reference to "love," not ChatGPT. *sushiaistlouis.com.*

FINALISTS

Café Mochi

indo

BEST SPORTS BAR

Syberg's

There's a reason that Syberg's has became a St. Louis staple, more than 40 years after Richard and Sally Syberg started a catering business that blossomed into a restaurant on Gravois Road. Today, the family-owned chain checks off all the requisite sports-bar boxes: great wings, pizza, TVs, and brews. *sybergs.com.*

FINALISTS

Mascots Bar & Grill

The Post Sports Bar & Grill

BEST SANDWICH

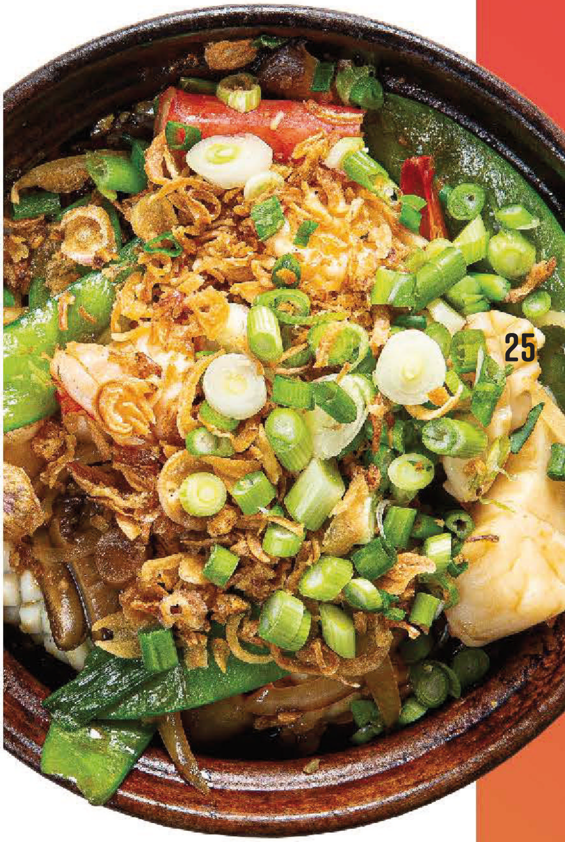
Gioia's Deli

After more than a century, the beloved Italian deli is still going strong, having won a James Beard Award in recent years and expanding far beyond The Hill. Customers are sure to queue at Gioia's newest addition, in Valley Park, for those signature hot salami sandwiches. *gioiasdeli.com.*

FINALISTS

Blues City Deli

Mom's Deli



BEST VIETNAMESE RESTAURANT

Mai Lee

After fleeing war-torn Vietnam in the '70s, Lee Tran moved to St. Louis and opened Mai Lee, a Chinese restaurant that began serving authentic Vietnamese fare over time. Today, it's widely considered St. Louis' first Vietnamese dining establishment. *maileestl.com.*

FINALISTS

DD Mau

Nudo House

BEST FRIED CHICKEN

Hodak's Restaurant & Bar

If the bright-green awning hanging over a Gulliver-size image of a plate of fried chicken doesn't lure you in, then the smell will. The kitchen still cooks up Helen Hodak's original recipe. Order it alongside the dumplings. *hodaks.com.*

FINALISTS

Grace Meat + Three

Hobos (at the American Legion)

BEST FRENCH FRIES

Steve's Hot Dogs

While the hot dogs are rightfully the star of the show at singer Steve Ewing's beloved spot, the fries play a powerful backup-singer-style role. They're best enjoyed on the patio during a concert at the adjacent Ritz Park. *steveshotdogsstl.com.*

FINALISTS

JP's Hideout Pub & Grill

Mac's Local Eats

BEST GROCERY STORE

Schnucks

With more than 100 stores across five states, the family-owned grocery store continues to deliver quality groceries while rolling out other offerings, including Schnucks Rewards, delivery, recipes, events, and more. *nourish.schnucks.com.*

FINALISTS

Dierbergs Markets

Straub's

BEST FINE DINING RESTAURANT

Twisted Tree Steakhouse

Go for the steak, but go extra hungry for the salad. While one cut of meat is better than the next, the house salad—with its hot garlic croutons and two house-made dressings—steals the show. *twistedtreesteakhouse.com.*

FINALISTS

Olive + Oak

Tony's

BEST FROZEN CUSTARD

Ted Drewes

Nothing can touch this St. Louis institution. The tradition, like the quality, is unmatched. With dozens of mix-ins to choose from, you can return year after year, generation after generation, and find a new favorite. *teddrewes.com.*

FINALISTS

Andy's Frozen Custard

Fritz's Frozen Custard

BEST FRENCH RESTAURANT

Brasserie by Niche

Nearly 15 years after opening, Gerard Craft's restaurant in the Central West End remains perpetually popular for good reason: It serves excellent French fare in a cozy, convivial atmosphere. Can't snag a table? The full menu is also available next door at Brass Bar. *brasseriebyniche.com.*

FINALISTS

Café Provencal / La Bonne Bouchée

•Bière •Vin •Cuisine•
BRASSERIE
by niche
TASTE
taste.

BEST HAPPY HOUR

Helen Fitzgerald's Irish Grill & Pub

The Sunset Hills staple serves up happy hour from 2–6 p.m. with such options as a refreshing cosmo and pomegranate martini and a rich, juicy fried-chicken slider. *helenfitzgeralds.com.*

FINALISTS

Mascots Bar & Grill

Narwhal's Crafted

BEST MEXICAN RESTAURANT

Arzola's Fajitas + Margaritas

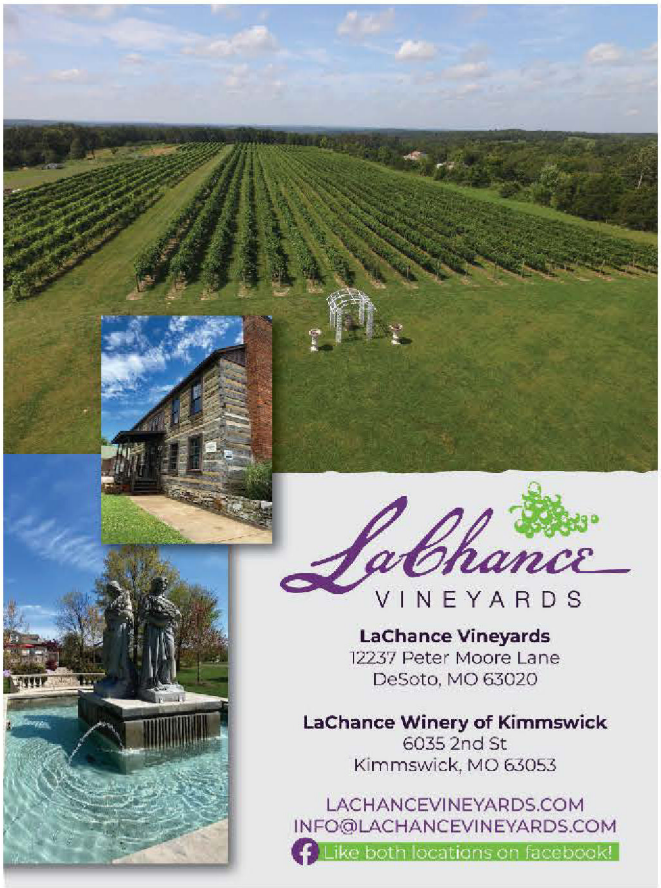
After building a following, Eddie Arzola opened the eponymous restaurant in Benton Park, which offers a vibrant atmosphere and quality food. *eatarzolas.com.*

FINALISTS

AMIGOS Cantina

La Catrina

Photography by **Kevin A. Roberts**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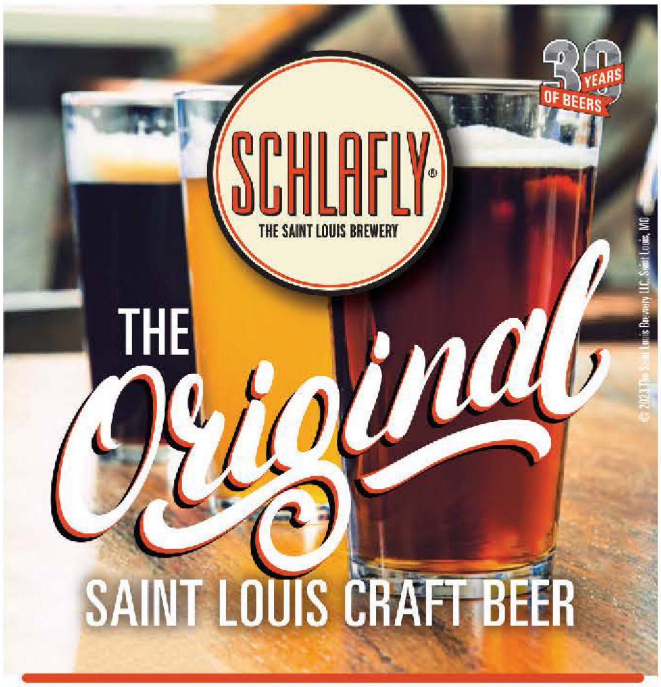
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BEST DINER

Southwest Diner

There's almost always a line around the corner for a seat here, though the wait is worth it, both for the food and the vibe. Start with sopas, a Southwest Slinger, and a bloody Mary. *southwestdinerstl.com.*

FINALISTS

Courtesy Diner

Olivette Diner

BEST NEW RESTAURANT

Arzola's Fajitas + Margaritas

Some restaurants prefer to ease into things. Arzola's, on the other hand, burst onto the scene in a big way, opening on Cinco de Mayo last year. It has quickly become a crowd favorite, winning the Best Mexican Restaurant category and placing as a finalist for Best Patio. Considering it checks so many boxes, it's no surprise that it took home this year's award for Best New Restaurant. *eatarzolas.com.*

FINALISTS

Affton Pizza Company

JP's Hideout Pub & Grill

BEST WINERY

LaChance Vineyards

With two locations south of St. Louis, near De Soto and Kimmswick, the Hamby family–owned wineries offer scenic views, distinct wines, and a range of menu items (flatbreads, sandwiches, barbecue, and more). *lachancevineyards.com.*

FINALISTS

Cedar Lake Cellars

Defiance Ridge Vineyards

BEST PIZZA (ST. LOUIS-STYLE)

Imo's

Ed and Margie Imo founded the pizzeria that's now synonymous with St. Louis–style pizza and "the square beyond compare" in 1964. Today, there are nearly 100 franchise locations—and the recent rollout of frozen pizzas. *imospizza.com.*

FINALISTS

Liliana's Italian Kitchen

Syberg's

BEST MIDDLE EASTERN RESTAURANT

Aya Sofia

The South City staple offers numerous spins on Mediterranean classics and authentic Turkish entrées. Consider the house specialty Cupra or the Hunkar Beyendi, otherwise known as the Sultan's Delight. *ayasofiacuisine.com.*

FINALISTS

Golden Chicken

The Vine Cafe

BEST INDIAN RESTAURANT

House of India

The University City restaurant has remained a local favorite for authentic Indian cuisine since 1995. Not sure where to start with the lengthy menu? Try the Yogi Thali for a generous sampling of dishes and dessert. *hoistl.com.*

FINALISTS

Himalayan Yeti

Saffron STL

BEST HIDDEN GEM RESTAURANT

Liliana's Italian Kitchen

Liliana's might not stay a hidden gem for long, after recently opening a second location in Cottleville. Customers come to the family-owned Italian restaurant for the chicken Parmesan sandwich, baked meatballs rigatoni, pizza (made with a blend of mozzarella and Provel), and more. They stay for the warm, friendly atmosphere. *lilianasitalian kitchen.com.*

FINALISTS

Cellar House

Loaded Elevated Nachos

BEST ICE CREAM

Clementine's Naughty & Nice Creamery

Now spanning eight locations across the metro area (including the quaint building next to the train tracks in Kirkwood), the ice cream shop continues to serve up innovative ice cream flavors, including alcoholic and vegan choices. *clementines creamery.com.*

FINALISTS

Boardwalk Waffles & Ice Cream

Serendipity Ice Cream & Sorbet

Photography by **Kevin A. Roberts**

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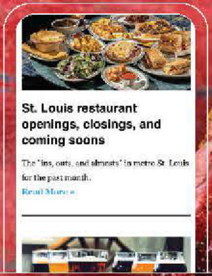
St. Louis restaurant openings, closings, and coming soons

The "ins, outs, and almosts" in metro St. Louis for the past month.

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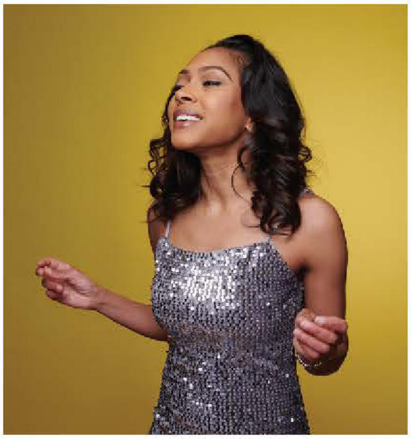
ARTS, CULTURE & ENTERTAINMENT

A-LIST AWARDS 2023

POWERHOUSE PERFORMANCES

The Midnight Company

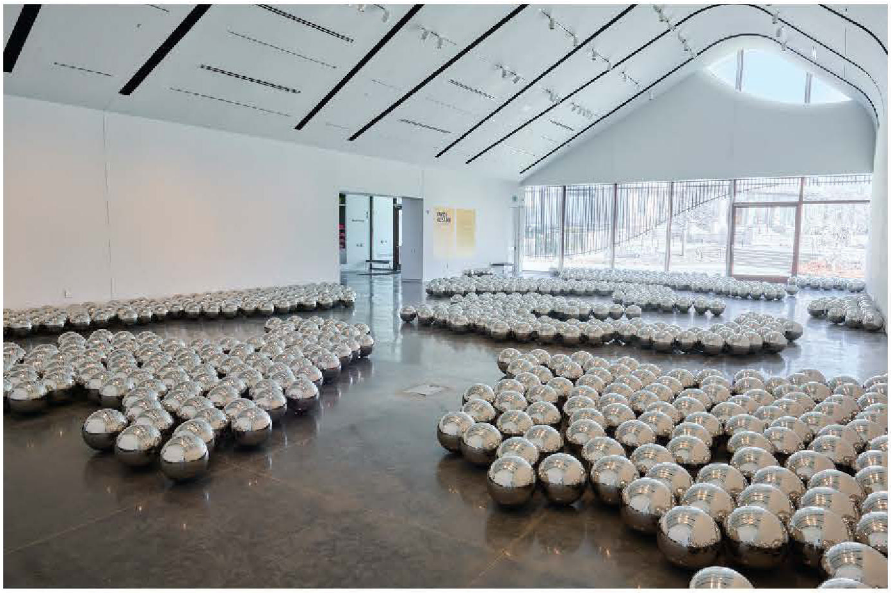
St. Louis was recently treated to two woman-led shows dedicated to icons. In the fall, Laka led a history lesson with *St. Louis Woman*, in which she took on the roles of Tina Turner, Josephine Baker, and others. Then, this spring, Kelly Howe embraced the '80s with *Just One Look*, a Linda Ronstadt cabaret. The production was so popular, its run was extended several times. *midnightcompany.com*.



STAR POWER

Narcissus Garden

Laumeier Sculpture Park's presentation of Yayoi Kusama's *Narcissus Garden* gave St. Louisans a rare chance to enjoy the artist's work without having to travel. The winding path of mirrored orbs offered a meditative experience (and some pretty great photo ops) inside Aronson Fine Arts Center. *laumeiersculpturepark.org*.

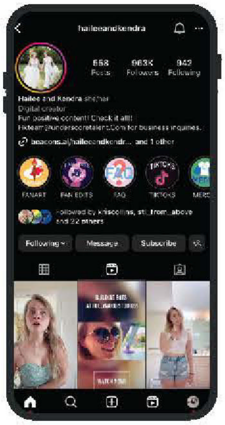


WALK DOWN MEMORY LANE

PROM Magazine: Where did you go to high school?

You've heard it. We've heard it. It is the question asked by St. Louis natives since time immemorial. Our city's obsession with those golden years is at the center of this free exhibit at the Central Library. Through October, explore the library's collection of *PROM Magazine*, a monthly publication dedicated to St. Louis public, private, and parochial high schools that ran from 1947–1973. *slpl.org*.

Photography by **Associated Press, Todd Davis, Wil Driscoll, Kevin A. Roberts,** courtesy of **Missouri History Museum**



INSTAGRAM

Hailee and Kendra

This duo has racked up nearly a million followers on Instagram while sharing their fun, positive content (including plenty of ideas for things to do in the city). In addition to Instagram, you can find the pair making videos on TikTok, YouTube, and streaming games on Twitch.

THEATER NEWCOMER

Prism Theatre Company

With its focus on the work of women and emerging artists, Prism is a welcome addition to St. Louis' thriving theater scene. Between its impressive main stage performances and a Festival of New Works that highlights up-and-coming voices in theater, it will be exciting to see what comes next for this small-but-mighty company. *prismtheatrecompany.org*.

FUNNY GIRL

Nikki Glaser

What a year it's been for Glaser (see p. 88). She rang in the new year for a couple thousand St. Louisans at Stifel Theatre, was all over TV (*RuPaul's Drag Race*, *The Masked Singer*, *Welcome Home Nikki Glaser*, *Good Clean Filth*), and announced a U.S. and European tour. Plus, her (other) reality TV show, *FBOY Island*, found a new home on The CW and announced an *FGIRL* spinoff. Glaser stays booked and busy for good reason.

EXCITING EXHIBIT

Coloring STL

Most museums don't allow you to touch anything on the walls, much less break out the markers and start coloring on them, but that's exactly the draw of the Missouri History Museum's *Coloring STL*. Visitors can learn about St. Louis architecture while enjoying the exhibit's innovative interactive elements. *mohistory.org*.

PROMISING PLAYWRIGHT

Courtney Bailey

Last summer, folks in the art, music, and theater worlds kept asking the same question: "Have you seen *Brontë Sister House Party* yet?" In addition to plenty of buzz, Slightly Askew Theatre Ensemble's world premiere production of Courtney Bailey's play, which was originally commissioned by the Confluence Writers Project, earned four nods from The St. Louis Theater Circle, including Outstanding New Play. Bailey's next project: the *Margaret Fuller Magick Show*.

TRAVELING SHOW

TourCo

Last summer, St. Louis Shakespeare Company's TourCo brought musician and composer Tre'Von Griffith's Afrofuturist version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to 24 parks across the region, taking the free play directly to scores of community members. This August, Cherokee Street Theater artistic director Suki Peters will lead the traveling caravan of actors in a production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in the style of a '90s sitcom. *stlshakes.org*.

HISTORY LESSON

Nuked: Echoes of the Hiroshima Bomb in St. Louis

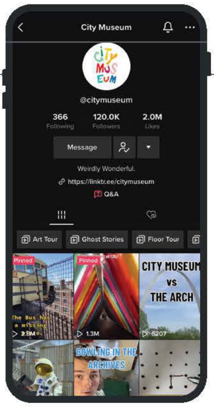
Linda C. Morice's account of St. Louis' role in the Manhattan Project—the program responsible for creating the first atomic bomb—and the ways we still grapple with the effects of refining uranium was one of the most fascinating and affecting reads of the past year. Even decades after the project's end, the contamination of St. Louis' northern suburbs is an ongoing public health concern, and cleanup is expected to take another 15 years.

CELEBRATION OF ARTISTS

10th Great Rivers Biennial

This year, the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis celebrated its 10th iteration of the Great Rivers Biennial, featuring regional talents Yowshien Kuo (*pictured*), Yvonne Osei, and Jon Young. For 20 years, the collaboration between CAM and the Gateway Foundation has supported and recognized area artists, including past winners Sarah Paulsen, Cayce Zavaglia, and Juan William Chávez. *camstl.org*.

Photography by **Kevin A. Roberts, Matt Marcinkowski**



FAVORITE FOLLOW

@CityMuseum on TikTok

The museum's "weirdly wonderful" tagline definitely extends to its TikTok account with fun, deeply relatable videos. Sometimes, that means sharing museum secrets and highlights; other times, it's sharing a list of top places in the museum for those needing a quiet spot to calm down. Whatever the topic, the videos keep it fresh, entertaining, and delightfully strange, just like the museum itself.

VISITING ARTIST

Faye HeavyShield

Right now, art lovers can experience the work of celebrated First Nations artist Faye HeavyShield across two local venues. *Faye HeavyShield: Confluences* runs through August 6 at the Pulitzer Arts Foundation and includes career-spanning works by the artist, who's a member of the Kainai Nation of southern Alberta. At the Saint Louis Art Museum, HeavyShield's work is on display in conversation with historic pieces from SLAM's collection as part of the Native Artist Collaboration series, on view through May 4, 2025.

RISING STAR

NandoSTL

The hip-hop artist is having an incredible year. His first album on T-Pain's Nappy-Boy label, *Y.O.T.A.*, came out in May and features artists such as Nelly, T-Pain, and Florida rapper Young Cash. As of this writing, the video for the album's lead single had racked up more than half a million views on YouTube.

NIGHT OUT

Free Public Previews at SLAM

Recently, the Saint Louis Art Museum began highlighting its exhibition openings with free public previews. These evening cocktail hours—complete with live music, drinks, and free early access to upcoming exhibitions—have quickly become some of our favorite date nights, whether with friends or loved ones. *slam.org*.

MUSEUM EXPANSION

St. Louis Kaplan Feldman Holocaust Museum

Last fall, the St. Louis Kaplan Feldman Holocaust Museum in Creve Coeur unveiled its $25 million expansion. The project added a 224-seat auditorium, a reading room, classrooms, and a special exhibit gallery to the space, as well as the Impact Lab, a place that the museum hopes can foster "Active Allies" who will speak out against injustice and discrimination. *stlholocaustmuseum.org*.

CREATIVE ENDEAVOR

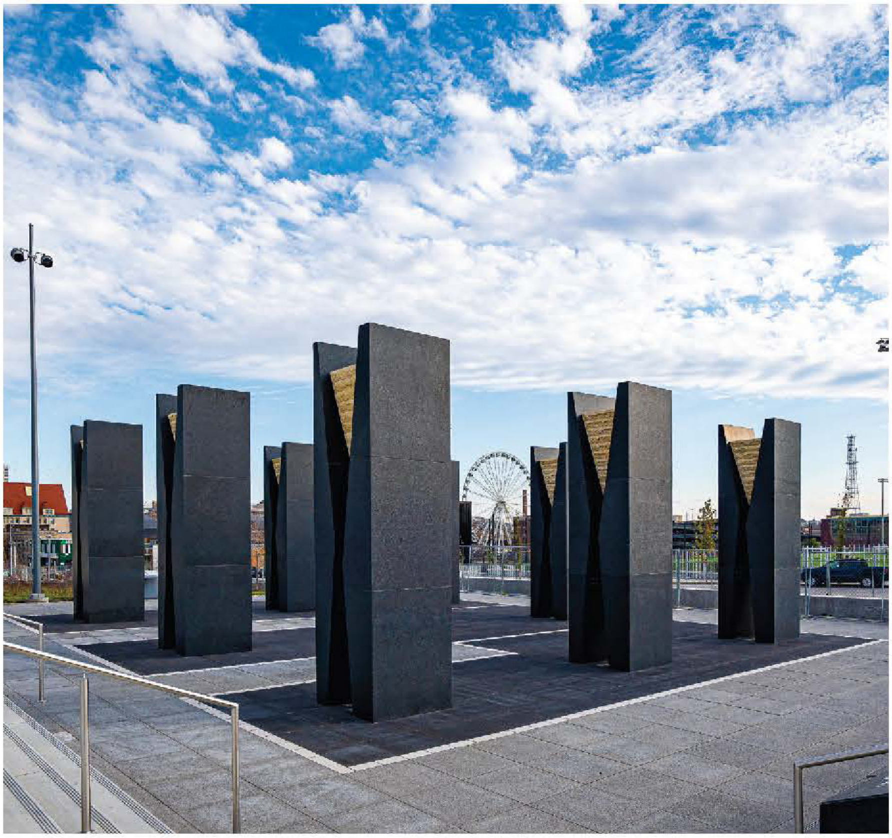
Opera Theatre of Saint Louis' New Works Collective

The idea: Putting stories in the hands of the community. The result: a trio of operas unlike anything we've seen before. This powerful project not only celebrated new voices in opera, but also attracted new audiences. The three new works for next year have already been chosen, and we can't wait to see what New Works Collective stages next. *opera-stl.org*.

LOCAL LEGEND

Joan Lipkin

Artist and activist Joan Lipkin's work spans the years and the globe, and this year, the St. Louis Theater Circle honored her with its Lifetime Achievement Award. Lipkin, who's also the producing artistic director of That Uppity Theatre Company, is a champion of marginalized voices and important causes, embodying the idea that the performing arts are about far more than just entertainment.



FITTING TRIBUTE

Pillars of the Valley

In February, CITYPARK unveiled *Pillars of the Valley*, artist Damon Davis' tribute to the former Mill Creek Valley neighborhood. The neighborhood was destroyed by the city in the late 1950s, forcing a thriving community of Black families and businesses elsewhere. But Davis' columns seek to preserve the memories of that community for generations to come. Each set of pillars contains a piece of pale limestone, meant to represent sand frozen in an hourglass. Between them, the words of former residents share sentiments about the lost community and its importance to the people who once called it home.

BEST NEW ALBUM

10,000 gecs

The band 100 gecs may just be the best thing to come out of St. Louis County in recent years. This spring, hyperpop duo Laura Les and Dylan Brady's long-awaited sophomore offering, *10,000 gecs*, arrived to much fanfare, including a "Best New Music" nod from *Pitchfork*. The joyfully chaotic collection of songs, including hit singles "mememe" and "Doritos & Fritos," has placed the pair firmly in local legend status.

PARENTAL
ADVISORY
EXPLICIT CONTENT

STIRRING SCENES

Confederates

Director Elizabeth Carter swung for the fences with her production of Dominique Morisseau's *Confederates* this spring. The result was one of the most memorable performances in recent years. A talented supporting cast bolstered raw, stirring performances from stars Tatiana Williams and Tiffany Oglesby, who did justice to Morisseau's poignant work.

ST. LOUIS SHOUT-OUT

Cocaine Bear

When we saw Elizabeth Banks' unhinged dark comedy about, well, a bear on cocaine, we weren't expecting the crowd to cheer. But when Ray Liotta (RIP) and his cronies were revealed as St. Louisans, cheer they did. Each time we've brought up the movie since, we've bonded over the same question: So, which local dive do you think would serve *plain penne*?

FANTASTIC TALE

Sir Callie and the Champions of Helston

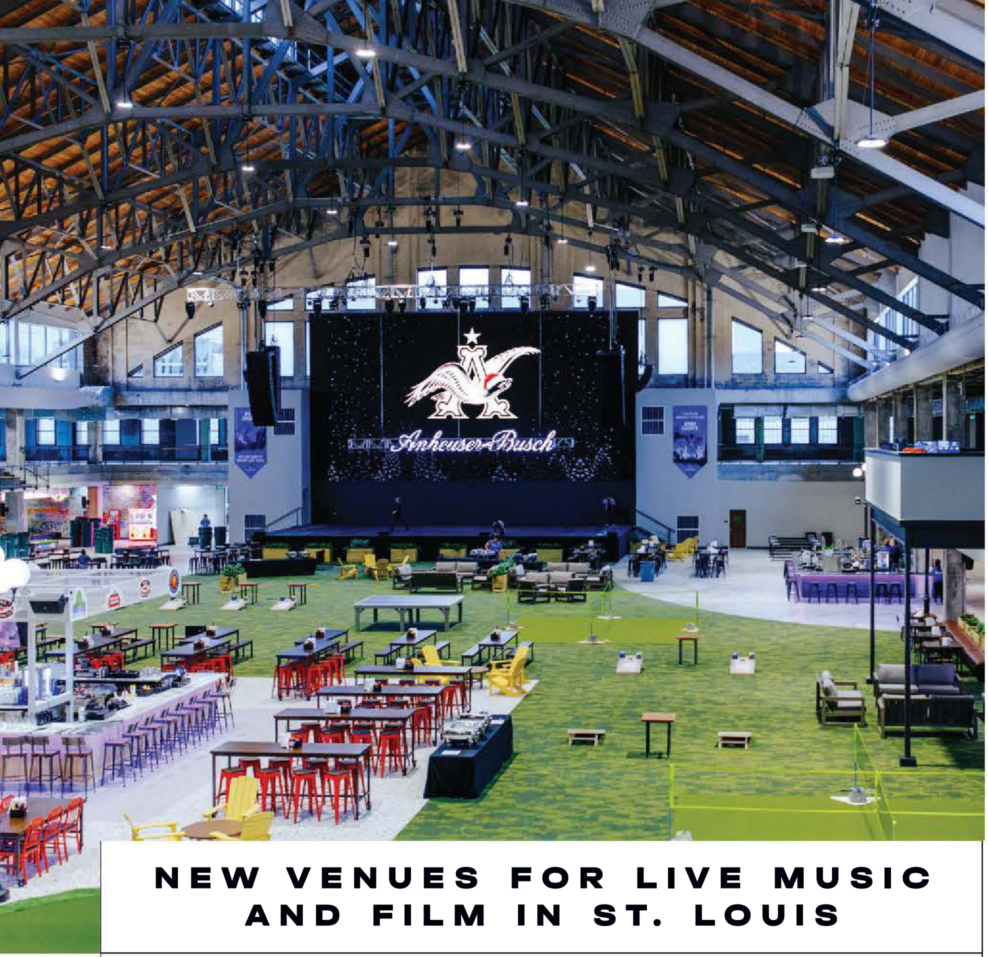
The first installment of Esme Symes-Smith's new fantasy series for young readers feels like an important addition to the genre. Children (and kids at heart) will almost certainly find a character with whom they can identify among the many residents of Helston. We look forward to following their further adventures in *Sir Callie and the Dragon's Roost*, out this fall from Labyrinth Road.

NEW GIG

Kirven Douthit-Boyd

When we asked local arts leaders what excited them most about the arts in St. Louis right now, nearly all of them mentioned Kirven Douthit-Boyd's arrival at The Big Muddy Dance Company. As artistic director, he is breathing new life into the company with his dedication to diversity and representation in dance.

Photography by **Kevin A. Roberts,** courtesy of **Armory STL,** ***Underneath: Children of the Sun***



NEW VENUES FOR LIVE MUSIC AND FILM IN ST. LOUIS

First and foremost, two music venues recently opened in Midtown. **City Winery** at City Foundry STL, a New York–based chain that boasts a space for intimate dining and concert experiences, opened in March. Just a stone's throw from City Foundry, the **Armory STL** indoor entertainment complex spans 6 acres, including six bars and a stage for live entertainment. In nearby Grand Center, the former home of The Stage @ KDHX and the Creepy Crawl reopened this past fall as **Central Stage**, a live music venue from the Kranzberg Arts Foundation. Additionally, **The Hawthorn**, taking its name from Missouri's state flower, opened last fall on Washington Avenue as both a venue for live music and private events.

In terms of movie theaters, **Alamo Drafthouse Cinema**—a boutique dine-in theater chain originally from Austin that specializes in first-run films, repertory screenings, and immersive movie party experiences—opened at City Foundry late last year. In December, Cinema St. Louis announced its purchase of the **Hi-Pointe Theatre** from the James family. The beloved movie house now serves as the organization's home base for its programming, including first-run independent films, entries in its Golden Anniversaries series, screenings for local festivals such as QFest, and other special events. And **Arkadin Cinema and Bar**, which shows rep programming that runs the gamut of silent classics, arthouse favorites, and grindhouse gems, opened its indoor theater space in March, after three years of outdoor screenings on its backlot.

MOVIE MAGIC

Underneath: Children of the Sun

Filmmaker David Kirkman's feature debut is a welcome new take on the sci-fi epic. The Washington University Department of African and African-American Studies artist-in-residence takes viewers on an Afrofuturist journey through the eyes of an enslaved person from Little Dixie, Missouri, as he's pulled into a battle for power between intergalactic forces.

AMBASSADORS

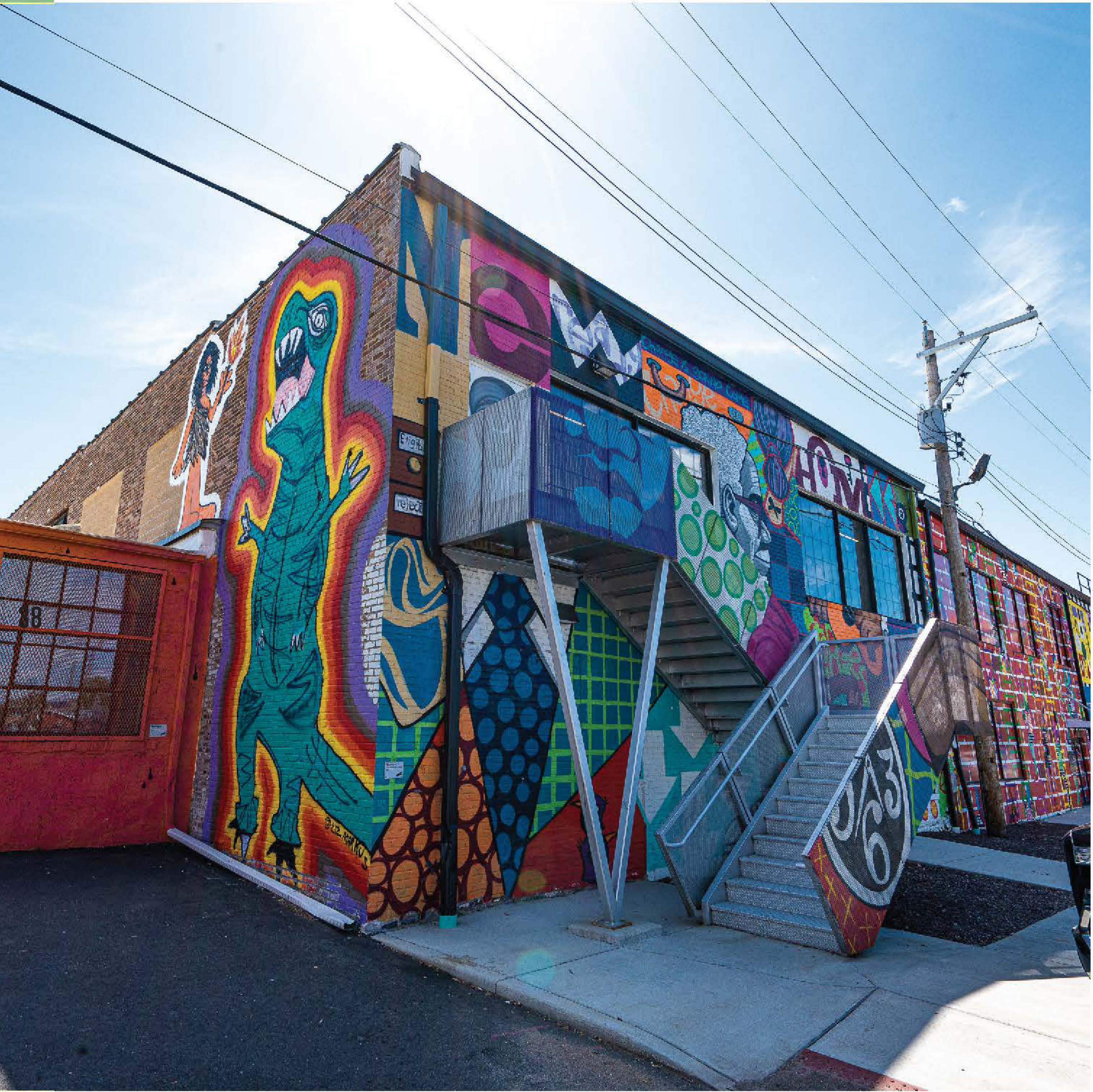
Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra

After a long break from traveling due to the pandemic, the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra returned to Europe this spring, taking the talents of the nation's second-oldest orchestra international with sought-after pianist Víkingur Ólafsson in tow. Reports from the tour—which made stops in Vienna, Brussels, the Netherlands, and Madrid—were excellent, and the ensemble returned home for the rest of the 2023–2024 season. *slso.org*.

QUICK READ

Notes from the Booklady's Desk

From The Noir Bookshop owner Ymani Wince, this zine inspired by Risograph printing is an essential addition to a collector's shelf. One highlight, "All We Have Is Each Other: Thoughts on Community," is an engaging, enlightening essay authored by Wince.



PUBLIC ART

The Walls Off Washington

Last fall, the Kranzberg Arts Foundation unveiled its 20-mural initiative, adding bursts of color and artistry to the spaces between Josephine Baker Boulevard and North Leonard Avenue. The collection of works includes pieces by artists from St. Louis and around the world, including Cbabi Bayoc, José Luis Vargas, and Pl@stic. *wallsstl.com.*

Photography by **Kevin A. Roberts**

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BEST ART EVENT

Saint Louis Art Fair

Each year, the much-anticipated art fair draws crowds to downtown Clayton, where competitively selected artists display their wares, and musical performances last from morning till dusk. This September, the popular event will mark its 30th anniversary. *saintlouisartfair.com.*

FINALISTS

Art in the Park
Schlafly Art Outside

BEST BAND (COVER)

Mr. Blue Sky

The 10-person tribute band creates "all the majestic splendor that is the music of Electric Light Orchestra," reprising ELO's greatest hits alongside some deeper cuts. *mrblueskymusic.com.*

FINALISTS

After Midnight
Just in Time

BEST ART MUSEUM

Saint Louis Art Museum

For more than a century, the stately museum in Forest Park has managed to balance the modern with the masters. This year, featured exhibitions include a look at armor from around the world, modern and contemporary Native American art, and the history of hip-hop. *slam.org.*

FINALISTS

Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis
St. Louis Mercantile Library Art Museum

BEST ART GALLERY

Soulard Art Gallery

Housed in a quaint home-turned-studio in historic Soulard, this co-op art gallery displays multidisciplinary work from resident artists. Every month, outside artists submit their work for a curated exhibition in the main gallery space. *soulardartgallery.com.*

FINALISTS

Green Door Art Gallery / Hunt Gallery at Webster University

SOULARD ART GALLERY
2028
LOCAL ARTISTS

BEST AUTHOR

Kevin Desrosiers

Desrosiers first conceptualized his book, *Bridge Over Adversity: True Stories About Overcoming Personal Challenges*, in 2005. Inspired by lessons learned from his father and first father-in-law, the 2021 release tells the story of 12 individuals who've overcome major life challenges. *bridgeoveradversity.com.*

FINALISTS

Bart Victor Baker
Samantha Markum

BEST BAND (ORIGINAL)

Greek Fire

Since forming in 2008, Greek Fire has been providing music for what its members once called a "rock-deprived generation." Along the way, they've produced two studio albums and multiple EPs, toured the world, and embraced a more solemn side of their sound. *officialgreekfire.com.*

FINALISTS

The Bosman Twins
Washington Avenue

BEST BLOG

Arch City Media

Arch City Media was founded with a mission to report on local sports—especially the teams that weren't receiving as much widespread attention. Today, the blog covers everything from roller derby to the St. Louis Cardinals, and it's even added an entertainment section. *archcity.media.*

FINALISTS

The Grieving Mamas Club
St. Louis Mom

BEST CASINO

Ameristar Casino Resort Spa

Located along the Missouri River in St. Charles, the 130,000-square-foot casino offers a range of dining options (from the upscale to quick bites at Fifth Street Deli), bars (King Cat Club, Star Club Lounge), and a luxury spa (Ara). Oh, and did we mention the games (from table games to a Topgolf Swing Suite)? *ameristarstcharles.com.*

FINALISTS

Hollywood Casino

River City Casino

BEST LIVE MUSIC VENUE

The Pageant

There's a reason The Pageant is lauded for its atmosphere: No matter where you sit, you're always within 70 feet of the stage. It's an intimate spot to see everyone from musician Gary Clark Jr. to comedian Michelle Wolf, as well as up-and-coming acts. *thepageant.com.*

FINALISTS

The Factory / Wildey Theatre

BEST BLUES PLAYER

Jordan Binnington

Binnington burst onto the scene in 2019 with an explosive 25-save shutout, followed by that unforgettable Stanley Cup victory. In December 2022, he won his 100th game and became the sixth goaltender in franchise history to earn 100 victories with the club. *nhl.com/blues.*

FINALISTS

Jordan Kyrou

Brayden Schenn

BEST CARDINALS PLAYER

Adam Wainwright

A three-time all-star, Waino has won nearly 200 games (at press time) and amassed countless accolades. After an announcement that 2023 would be his last year on the mound, he performed the national anthem at the season's opening day game. *mlb.com/cardinals.*

FINALISTS

Nolan Arenado

Lars Nootbar

BEST DJ

Wendy Fitter

Fitter's company, Unleashed Music & Event Planning, offers DJ services for an array of celebrations. With more than 600,000 songs in its music library, the team can create a custom playlist for any occasion. *unleashedmusicstl.com.*

FINALISTS

Arty J

Atomix and The Vōkalist

BEST COMEDY CLUB

Funny Bone

For nearly four decades, the Funny Bone at Westport Plaza has been a local comedy hub. It attracts national talent every week, and it's where greats like Kathleen Madigan and Greg Warren got their start. *stlouisfunnybone.com.*

FINALISTS

Helium Comedy Club

The Improv Shop

BEST CONCERT SERIES

Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra

There's programming for everyone at the SLSO, from live performances of movie soundtracks to collaborations with world-renowned artists, such as violinist Hilary Hahn. Catch the orchestra's Forest Park Concert this September, then stay tuned for its annual slate of holiday shows. *slso.org.*

FINALISTS

Hot Country Nights

Whitaker Music Festival (Missouri Botanical Garden)

BEST DANCE COMPANY

STL Rhythm Collaborative

Formed through a merger of local dancers and musicians, the STL Rhythm Collaborative provides performing arts opportunities for learners of all ages. This month, the nonprofit will host its third annual STL Rhythm Fest. *stlrhythmcollaborative.org.*

FINALISTS

Big Muddy Dance Company

St Lou Dance Crew

Photography by **Matt Marcinkowski, IndieImageSTL,** courtesy of **Greek Fire, St. Louis Art Museum, STL Rhythm Collaborative**

BEST FESTIVAL

Festival of the Little Hills

What was once a small craft fair on St. Charles' Main Street has grown into a weekend-spanning extravaganza. The festival boasts an extensive entertainment lineup, hundreds of artisan booths, and food ranging from fried pies to turkey legs. *festivalofthelittlehills.com*.

FINALISTS

Festival of Nations

Tower Grove Pride

BEST LIVE THEATER GROUP

The Muny

Even after more than a century, the beloved venue continues to draw crowds to Forest Park for magical performances under the stars. The current season features such classics as *West Side Story* and *Rent*, alongside the fantastical comedy *Little Shop of Horrors*. *muny.org*.

FINALISTS

The One Four Fives

The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis

BEST MOVIE THEATER

Marcus Ronnie's Cinema

There's far more to do than catch a movie at Ronnie's in South County. Next to the lobby, check out a full arcade, cocktail lounge, and '50s-themed diner with drive-in-inspired seating. And when you're ready to see a flick, choose from among 20 screens, including an IMAX. *marcustheatres.com*.

FINALISTS

Chase Park Plaza Cinemas

The Hi-Pointe Theatre

E-L
EACH BOYS
SHERYL CROW
BAND

BEST LOCAL MUSICIAN

Moon Valjean

On his Twitter profile, Valjean describes himself as a "MOON of many hats." It's an apt descriptor for the singer and guitarist, who's the frontman for local band Greek Fire, a rhythmic guitarist and vocalist for L.A.–based band Goldfinger, and a cohost of *The Rizzuto Show*. *facebook.com/MoonValjean*.

FINALISTS

Ryan Cheney / Kelvin Evans

BEST MUSEUM (NON-ART)

City Museum

The whimsical destination is a museum unlike any other: An airplane is suspended in metal tubing out front, and a school bus hangs from its roof. But just wait until you step inside. Dreamed up by the late Bob Cassilly, the museum feels like an overactive imagination come to life—in the best way. *citymuseum.org*.

FINALISTS

Missouri History Museum

St. Louis Kaplan Feldman Holocaust Museum

BEST SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNT/ INFLUENCER (LOCAL)

R & R Ranch

When Stacy Rolfe first purchased two neglected mini ponies, she had no idea that her property would soon house 24 mini rescue horses and a bunny—let alone that they would become social-media stars. Today, they have a sizable TikTok following and are available as plushies. *randrranchminis.com*.

FINALISTS

The End Is Near So Let's Drink Beer–Brandon McNamee

STL AIN'T BAD

Photography by **Matt Marcinkowski, Phillip Hamer**

The Fabulous Fox

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105.7 THE POINT
THE
RIZZUT

BEST RADIO PERSONALITY

Scott Rizzuto (105.7 The Point)

Since *The Rizzuto Show* took to the airwaves nearly a decade ago, Rizzuto's wit, candor, and creative segments have drawn a loyal following. Rizzuto recently signed a new five-year deal with Hubbard Radio. *1057thepoint.com/shows/rizzuto-show.*

FINALISTS

Jason Church (WSIE FM) / Courtney Landrum (106.5 The Arch)

BEST RADIO SHOW

The Rizzuto Show (105.7 The Point)

The community was saddened by the devastating loss of co-host Jeff Burton last year. Since then, former KSHE-95 personality Lauren "Lern" Colvin and comedian Rafe Williams have joined the show, which also includes King Scott and A-List awardees Scott Rizzuto and Moon Valjean. *1057thepoint.com/shows/rizzuto-show.*

FINALISTS

***The Courtney Show* (106.5 The Arch)**

***The Jazz Collective with Jason Church* (107.3 FM, 88.7 FM)**

BEST RADIO STATION

105.7 The Point–KPNT

The station is home to the A-List Readers' Choice Awards' most popular radio personality (Scott Rizzuto) and show (*The Rizzuto Show*), so it follows that 105.7 The Point—which is billed as the city's source for "everything alternative" and also brings Pointfest to St. Louis each year—tops the list of readers' favorite radio stations, too. *1057thepoint.com.*

FINALISTS

106.5 The Arch–WARH

88.7 The Sound–WSIE

BEST SPORTS TEAM

St. Louis Cardinals

While we might be a little biased, it's safe to say that Cardinals fans are some of the most passionate in baseball. And with 11 World Series championship wins, why not sport a little St. Louis pride? Let's go, Redbirds! *mlb.com/cardinals.*

FINALISTS

St. Louis Blues

St. Louis CITY SC

BEST TALK/NEWS RADIO SHOW

The Dave Glover Show (KMOX 1120 AM)

The Dave Glover Show has graced local airwaves for more than two decades. Host Dave Glover breaks down a vast range of topics, from news and politics to where to find the best St. Louis fish fry. *audacy.com/kmox/hosts/the-dave-glover-show.*

FINALISTS

***The Annie Frey Show* (97.1 FM)**

***St. Louis On the Air*, St. Louis Public Radio (90.7 FM KWMU)**

BEST TOURIST ATTRACTION

Saint Louis Zoo

In a 2023 *USA Today* poll, the Saint Louis Zoo was voted among the top 10 zoos in the country. With more than 16,000 animals, it somehow just keeps getting better, including the addition of Primate Canopy Trails and such special exhibits as *Dinoroarus* in recent years. *stlzoo.org.*

FINALISTS

Forest Park

Missouri Botanical Garden

Photography by **Matt Marcinkowski, Kevin A. Roberts**

BLICK®
art materials
We've Moved!

Check out our newest retail store on Hanley Road for an expanded selection of art supplies, unique gifts, and custom printing and framing services.

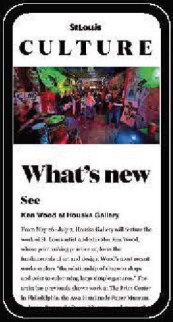
Our Hanley store is centrally located at 2355 S. Hanley Rd. between Highway 40 (I-64) and Manchester Road. Parking is FREE!

StLouis

Get a guide to the St. Louis arts scene with our

CULTURE

NEWSLETTER



StLouis
CULTURE
What's new
See
Ken Wood at Houska Gallery

The Culture newsletter highlights the worlds of visual arts, theater, music, and literature. Subscribe to receive our latest arts and culture coverage in your inbox every week.

SCAN THE QR CODE OR VISIT STLMAG.COM/NEWSLETTERS TO SUBSCRIBE.

BEST TV MORNING SHOW

FOX 2 News in the Morning

Despite getting up in the wee hours, the FOX 2 morning team manages to deliver an informative mix of news—both hard-hitting and lighthearted—in a personable, entertaining way. *fox2now.com.*

FINALISTS

Great Day **(KMOV 4)**

Today in St. Louis **(KSDK 5)**

BEST TV METEOROLOGIST

Glenn Zimmerman (FOX 2)

The longest-tenured meteorologist in the city's history, Zimmerman has expertly delivered the weather forecast to viewers for more than three decades—and his photography on Instagram (*instagram.com/zimmtv*) is pretty cool, too. *fox2now.com.*

FINALISTS

Scott Connell (KSDK 5)

Steve Templeton (KMOV 4)

BEST TV SPORTS ANCHOR

Frank Cusumano (KSDK 5)

Cusumano remembers his passion for sports beginning around age 6, when he attended a game of the 1968 World Series. Over time, he's served as KSDK's sports director, hosted his own talk show, and earned a 2022 induction into the St. Louis Sports Hall of Fame. *ksdk.com.*

FINALISTS

Martin Kilcoyne (FOX 2)

Doug Vaughn (KMOV 4)

BEST WEEKEND GETAWAY

Lake of the Ozarks

Fun fact: The lake's 1,100 miles of shoreline are longer than California's coast. There's plenty to see and do, including fine dining, shopping, a boat tour on a pirate ship, and a zipline through the forest. *funlake.com.*

FINALISTS

Hermann, Missouri

Pere Marquette State Park

BEST TV NEWS ANCHOR

Mandy Murphey (FOX 2)

A 14-time Emmy Award winner, Murphey prides herself on being "an anchor who can report." She celebrated three decades at KTVI in 2021 and was inducted into the NATAS Mid-America Emmy Silver Circle in 2022, after more than 25 years of distinguished service in the industry. *fox2now.com.*

FINALISTS

Mike Bush (KSDK 5) / Rene Knott (KSDK 5)

Photography by **Matt Marcinkowski**

St.Louis
MAGAZINE
A
LIST
2023 WINNER
MARIE THÉRÈSE BOURGEOIS CHOUTEAU
ELIZABETH KECKLEY
ANNA SNEED CAIRNS
SUSAN BLOW
JEFFERSON MEMORIAL
MISSOURI HISTORY MUSEUM
STL

VOTED BEST HOME HEALTH CARE

AccuCare
Home Health Care of St. Louis

1185 N. Price Rd., St. Louis, MO 63132
314.692.0020 | www.accucare.com

Grand opening

LA COLLINA
Terrace

NEW TOWNHOMES ON THE HILL

- New product line on The Hill
- Three story floorplan, the Florence
- From the low $300's

La Collina is within walking distance to many local favorite restaurants and shops, including Milo's, Vitale's Bakery, Missouri Baking Company, Rigazzi's, Zia's, St. Ambrose Catholic Church, and many more.

MCBRIDE HOMES
Missouri's Largest Homebuilder

EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY

St.Louis MAGAZINE
A LIST
2023 WINNER

SHOPPING, SERVICE & WELLNESS

A-LIST AWARDS 2023

BEST WORKOUT FOR NEW MOMS

Materra Method

When Abby Erker launched Materra Method in 2019, she did so with the goal of helping moms stay fit. The studio, which opened its first brick-and-mortar location in University City last year, offers classes that mix principles of Pilates and barre with exercises designed to boost strength in areas of the body where pregnancy takes a toll. Classes are divided into levels that correspond to each trimester and early postpartum, ensuring there's a carefully designed workout for moms at all stages of pregnancy and beyond. *materramethod.com*.

BEST FOLLOW-THROUGH

Topgolf

The success of Topgolf is found in its simplicity: gather a group of friends, order some food and drinks, and smack golf balls at a bunch of fixed, glowing targets. You don't have to be anything close to a seasoned golfer to have a good time. Maybe you've already taken some swings at Topgolf's location in Chesterfield, which opened five years ago. Later this fall, the company will open a new location in Midtown, featuring three levels and 102 hitting bays, as well as an on-site bar, restaurant, and private event space. *topgolf.com*.

BEST NEW ANTIQUE MALL

Get Your Picks on 66

Vintage shopping is as popular as ever. At Randi and Josh Benedick's antique mall in Webster Groves, you can find anything from furniture (from any decade) to retro records, toys, and clothes. There are also booths that offer antique materials and finishing products to help bring your latest restoration project to completion. *facebook.com/getyourpicksson66*.

BEST SOAP SEQUEL

KIND Soap

After a decade at its former location, KIND recently moved about a block away, to a new, larger storefront in the heart of Webster Groves. Now, owner Jean Scholtes offers more than naturally scented, handmade soaps, including more skin, bath, and beauty products, in additon to hosting events and classes. *kindsoap.com*.

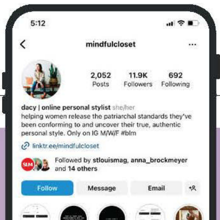
BEST CREATIVE USE OF LEATHER

Ansgar Leather

Owner Svein Staaby makes all of the leather products that you might anticipate: belts, wallets, and journals… But it's the more adventurous wares—chess boards, mason-jar-mug koozies, coasters, and custom-designed items with topographical maps—that make this family-owned business a standout. *ansgarleather.co*.

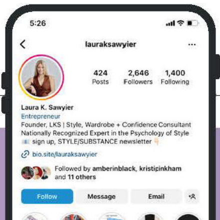
THE BEST OF INSTAGRAM

@Mindfulcloset:
Dacy Gillespie is a St. Louis–based personal stylist who helps women ditch the clothes they think they are supposed to wear in favor of outfits that are authentically them.



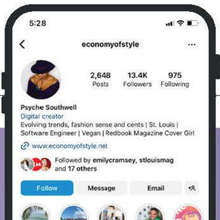
5:12
mindfulcloset
2,052 Posts
11.9K Followers
692 Following
dacy | online personal stylist she/her
helping women release the patriarchal standards they've been conforming to and uncover their true, authentic personal style. Only on IG M/W/F #blm
linktr.ee/mindfulcloset
Followed by stlouismag, anna_brockmeyer and 14 others

@Lauraksawyier:
Offering tips for both men and women, Laura Sawyier shares wardrobe insights for any occasion, from casual summer hangs to formal dinners.



5:26
lauraksawyier
424 Posts
2,646 Followers
1,400 Following
Laura K. Sawyier
Entrepreneur
Founder, LKS | Style, Wardrobe + Confidence Consultant
Nationally Recognized Expert in the Psychology of Style
sign up, STYLE/SUBSTANCE newsletter
bio.site/lauraksawyier
Followed by amberinblack, kristipinkham and 11 others

@Economyofstyle:
Psyche Southwell shows followers how to stock their closets with clothes that are both trendy and affordable.



5:28
economyofstyle
2,648 Posts
13.4K Followers
975 Following
Psyche Southwell
Digital creator
Evolving trends, fashion sense and cents | St. Louis | Software Engineer | Vegan | Redbook Magazine Cover Girl
www.economyofstyle.net
Followed by emilycramsey, stlouismag and 17 others

Photography by Kevin A. Roberts, Carmen Troesser, fcafotodigital / iStock / Getty Images Plus / via Getty Images, courtesy of Materra Method

FRESH FOODS

A mix of new grocery stores focusing on fresh foods and health-focused products have recently opened in the region. **Schnucks' Eatwell Market** in Chesterfield carries a vast selection of natural and organic items, and it specializes in products made without antibiotics or growth hormones. The **Fresh Thyme at City Foundry STL** provides shoppers with an assortment of healthy options in the heart of the city, and **Aldi's** new location in Rock Hill is full of fresh produce and essential items.

BEST NEW MULTI-MODALITY FITNESS STUDIO

TruFusion at City Foundry STL

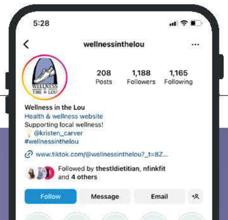
The locally owned gym opened its newest location in March. The 13,000-square-foot studio features a variety of group fitness classes tailored to all fitness levels. TruFusion specializes in exercises that prioritize high-intensity interval training. So whether bootcamp workouts, Pilates classes, or boxing is your jam, there's a class to suit the kind of sweat you're looking for. *trufusion.com/st-louis.*

BEST NEW COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PHARMACY

GreaterHealth Pharmacy

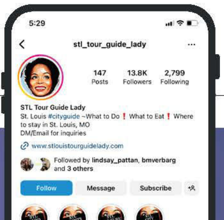
Upon obtaining his Ph.D. in human development at North Carolina State University, Dr. Marcus Howard returned to his hometown to open a pharmacy that could help underserved communities. At GreaterHealth Pharmacy, which opened last year at the Delmar Divine, Howard has created a business that offers wide-ranging health and wellness services, including point-of-care testing, counseling, immunization, and prescription fulfillment. *greaterhealthpharmacy.com.*

@Wellnessinthelou:
Highlighting some of the best places to eat healthy, work out, and enjoy nature, this account is a helpful guide for active St. Louisans.



5:28
wellnessinthelou
208 Posts
1,188 Followers
1,165 Following
Wellness in the Lou
Health & wellness website
Supporting local wellness!
💡 @kristen_carver
#wellnessinthelou
www.tiktok.com/@wellnessinthelou?_t=8Z...
Followed by thestldietitian, nfinkfit and 4 others

@Stl_tour_guide_lady:
Whether you're a visitor or a lifelong resident of the region, you'll find ideas about what to do and experience in St. Louis on this wide-ranging, hip feed.



5:29
stl_tour_guide_lady
147 Posts
13.8K Followers
2,799 Following
STL Tour Guide Lady
St. Louis #cityguide ~What to Do ❗ What to Eat ❗ Where to stay in St. Louis, MO
DM/Email for inquiries
www.stlouistourguidelady.com
Followed by lindsay_pattan, bmverbarg and 3 others

BEST CREATIVE USE OF ANTIQUE ENDPAPERS

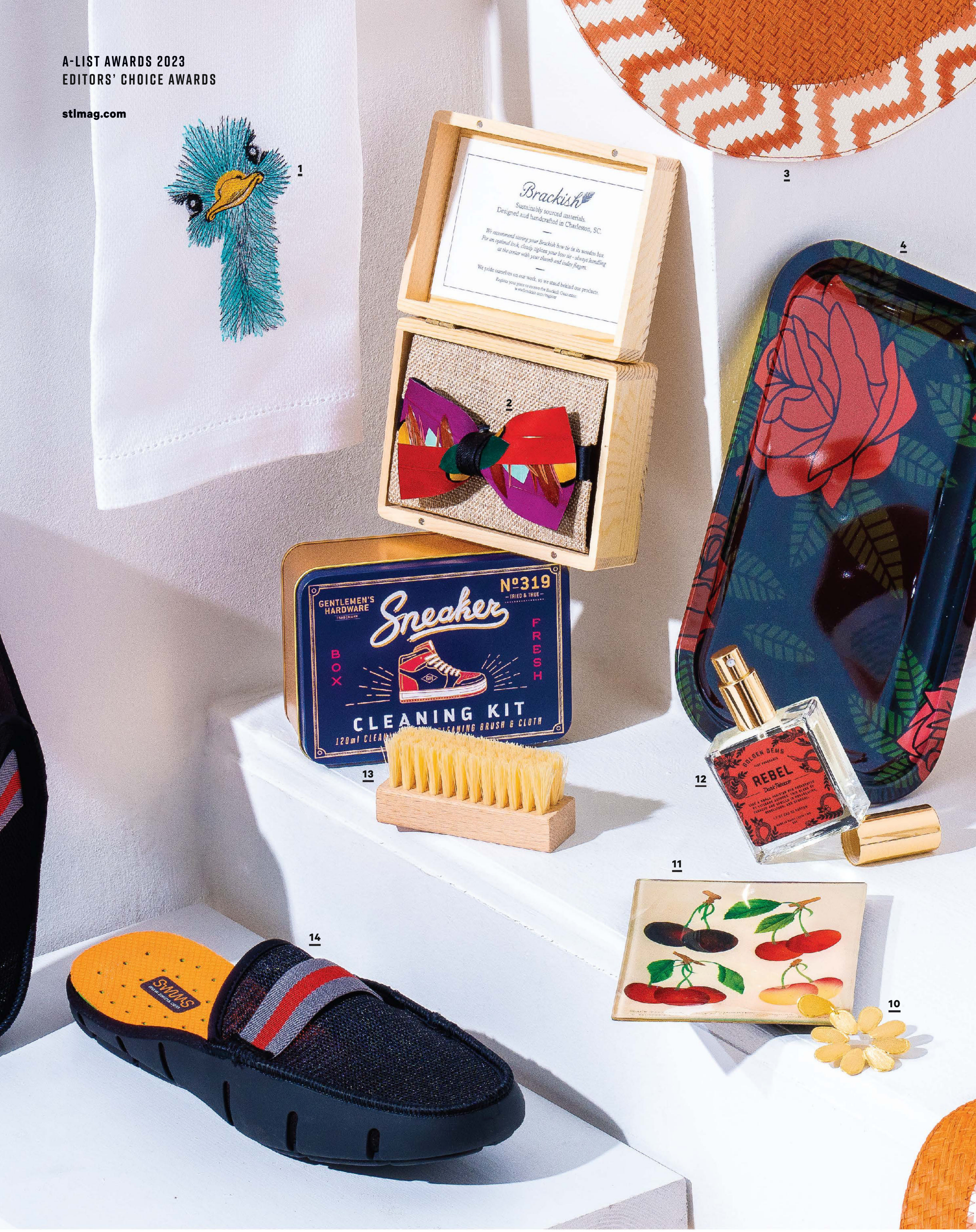
Papillon Press

Vernon and Madeleine Wiering comprise the father-daughter duo behind this decorative printing business, which expanded from its home base in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to St. Louis in 2020. To create its catalog of stationery, linens, greeting cards, and notebooks, Papillon Press uses designs inspired by the antique endpapers traditionally found on the front and back covers of books. The result is a collection of intricately patterned paper products that make perfect gifts or treats for yourself. *papillon-press.com.*

BEST WATERWAY CONCEPT

Dardenne Creek Blueway

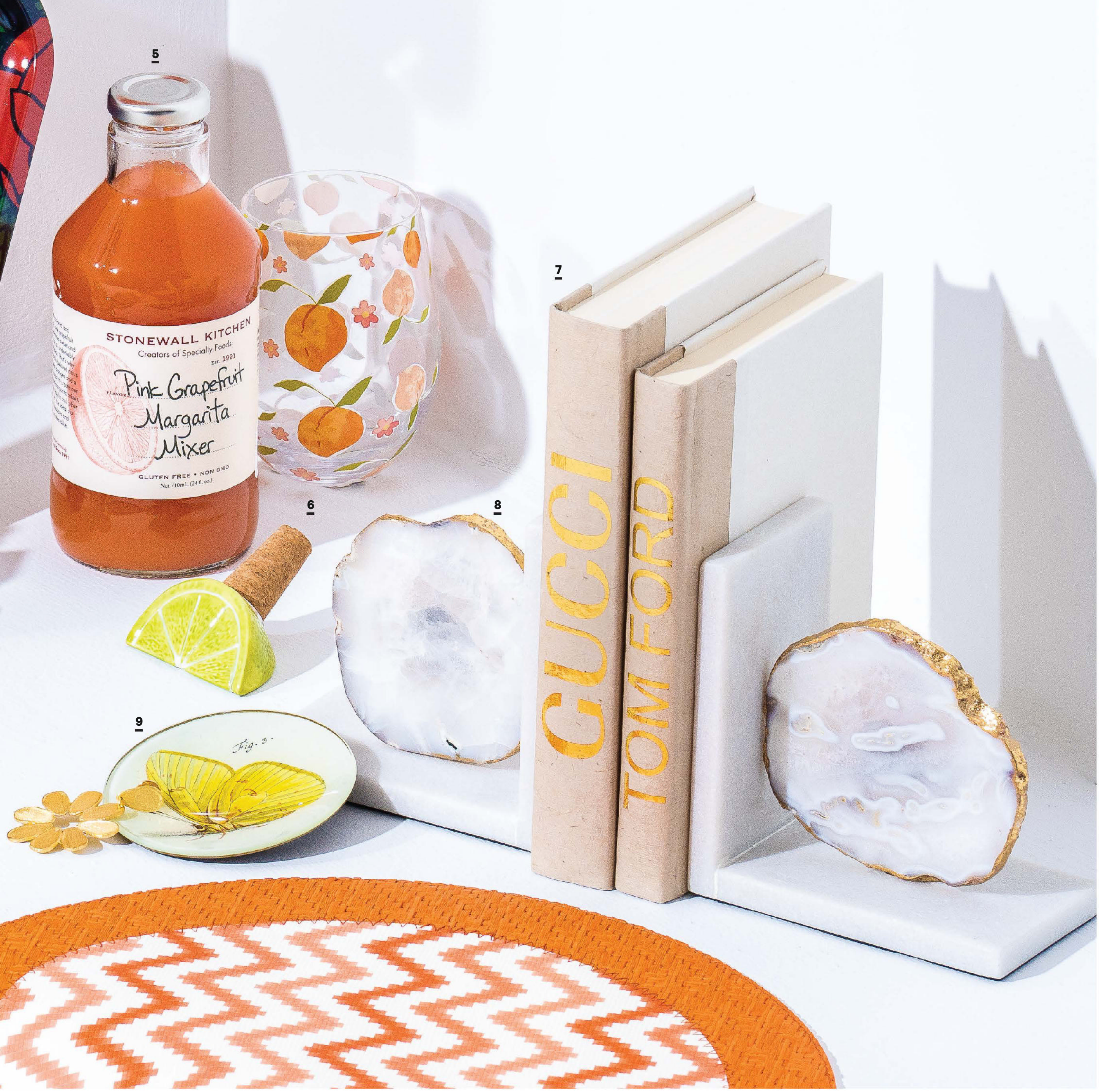
Rent a kayak and spend a day exploring one of the region's newest outdoor attractions. The blueway opened last summer in St. Charles County with a 3.5-mile water trail that stretches from Riverside Landing Park to 370 Lakeside Park in St. Peters. When the waterway is completely cleared in the coming years, it will cover a 19-mile track. For now, anyone can hop in a watercraft and enjoy a paddle trip, while admiring the native wildlife in a relaxing setting. *sccmo.org/2248/Blueways.*


1
2
3
4
Brackish
Sustainably sourced materials.
Designed and handcrafted in Charleston, SC.
GENTLEMEN'S HARDWARE
Nº319
TRIED & TRUE
Sneaker
BOX
FRESH
CLEANING KIT
13
12
GOLDEN GEMS
REBEL
11
10
14
SWIMS
www.swims.com

Photography by **Kevin A. Roberts**

Present Perfect

1. Ostrich embroidered tea towel, *$20. Women's Exchange.* **2.** Brakish bowtie handmade in Charleston South Carolina, *$228. Hearth and Soul.* **3.** Bodrum woven placemats, *$29. Marketplace at the Abbey.* **4.** Thorny rose medium tray, *$18. Golden Gems.* **5.** Stonewall kitchen pink grapefruit magarita mixer, *13.99. RF Home Co.* **6.** Glass with wine cork, *23.99. RF Home Co.* **7.** Decorative books, *$40. Donnelly Decor.* **8.** Slice of Agate Stone set book ends, *$131.67. Donnelly Decor.* **9.** 4-inch dish, *$60. Holliday.* **10.** Earrings, *$88. Story Seven.* **11.** 4.5-by-6-inch tray, *$85. Holliday.* **12.** Rebel Eau de Parfum, *$58. Golden Gems.* **13.** Sneaker cleaning kit, *$32. Sweet Boutique.* **14.** Swims waterproof slide loafers, *$148. Hearth and Soul.*


5
STONEWALL KITCHEN
Creators of Specialty Foods
Est. 1991
Pink Grapefruit Margarita Mixer
GLUTEN FREE • NON GMO
7
GUCCI
TOM FORD
6
8
9

BEST WAY TO ENTERTAIN KIDS ON THE MOVE

Keke Kids

Any parent of a small child knows that one of the biggest challenges of leaving the house is keeping little ones busy. That's where Jenn Mariani wants to help. Mariani's line of small bags is designed to provide hours of entertainment for kiddos on the go. Geared toward kids ages 3–6, the bags feature four custom pouches full of items that grow developmental skills, such as social/emotional, fine motor, pre-academic, and creative. *kekekid.com.*

BEST CUSTOM CANDLES

Urban Candle Company

Now located in a larger South City storefront following a move last October, Urban Candle sells smells fit for all seasons and moods. The sweet-scented, all-natural, soy candles come in a variety of sizes. Commission a custom flavor, or take advantage of one of the make-your-own events to create a scent that's just right for you. *urbancandleco.com.*

BEST NEW MENSWEAR STORE

Webster Dry Goods

This new menswear boutique in Webster Groves serves the stylish man, offering a variety of pants, shirts, and footwear from designer brands. The store's clothing catalog reflects the latest trends of the season, helping guys look sharp and effortlessly cool. *websterdrygoods.com.*

BEST CULTURE-MEETS-CLOTHING INITIATIVE

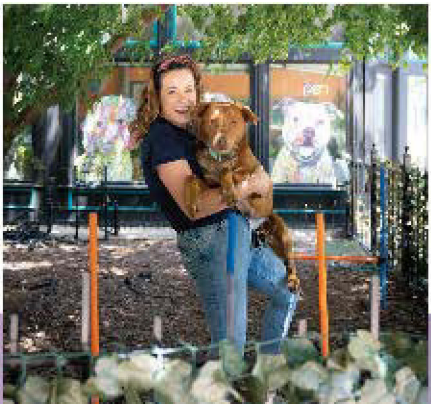
The Collective Thread

With the goal of helping local refugee and immigrant women in need, this St. Louis–based nonprofit provides small-batch manufacturing, product development, and other design services. In May, a fashion show at The Sheldon featured design inspirations from countries such as Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Egypt, Mexico, and Mongolia. It helped raise money to fund the organization's free sewing classes and training workshops. *thecollectivethread.org.*

BEST FORCE-FREE DOG TRAINING AND INSTA ACCOUNT

Good Dog Enrichment & Training

Not only does this dog training service in Tower Grove South offer everything from obedience lessons to tricks and agility training, but it also maintains an Instagram account (*@thegooddogsofstl*) that's sure to make you smile. Check the daily Instagram stories to meet all of the good boys and girls enrolled in the onsite programs. *gooddogstl.com.*



BRIGHT & BEAUTIFUL

When it comes to brightening your home, local floral design companies have just what you need to make any space feel warmer and lighter. Consider **Bloomin' Buckets**, which recently moved into a new space in Rock Hill. In Shaw, **39th Street Floral** makes some of the most ornate custom floral arrangements you'll find in the region.

BEST ART-MEETS-UPHOLSTERY

Art by Gomez

Bold shapes and vibrant colors are hallmarks of Jose Gomez's work, which include his conceptual paintings and extraordinary approaches to furniture design and upholstery. A native of Honduras, Gomez learned how to upholster from his father. He now plies his trade at his South City studio, where customers can find everything from hand-painted wall art to luxury pillows to some of the most uniquely designed sofas and chairs you'll find in St. Louis. *artbygomez.com.*

BEST NEW BRICK-AND-MORTAR BOUTIQUE EXPANSION

Polished Prints

Leah Longueville's brick-and-mortar store at City Foundry STL is the latest sign of growth for Polished Prints, a darling clothing company for women and kids. The in-store selection ranges from graphic T-shirts to accessories, gifts for teachers, and much more. *polished-prints.com.*

Photography by **Carmen Troesser, Kevin A. Roberts**

BEST NEW SUPERFOOD BOWLS

J&B Wellness

Owners Brittany and Jacob McDermott recently opened this café in Cottleville, which offers healthy sandwiches, smoothie bowls, cold-pressed juices, and more. They endeavor to help on-the-go customers find food and beverages that are both nutritious and convenient while spreading knowledge about the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. *jbwellstl.com.*

BEST HEALTHY RESPONSE TO A COMMUNITY NEED

Fit and Food Connection

The nonprofit provides those living in food and fitness deserts with healthy meals, exercise workshops, and other services geared toward helping everyone live their best lives. A seasonal wellness series features free fitness classes designed for people of all activity levels; the classes help participants get active and build a healthy foundation that will guide them for years to come. *fitandfoodconnection.org.*

BEST COZY VINTAGE SHOP

Your Friend's Apartment

When she opened the vintage boutique on Cherokee Street, Megan McCalla wanted to create a warm, inviting space that would make customers feel like they're visiting a best friend's home. The result: a cozy shop that features clothing and accessories in a wide selection of colors and trends. *yourfriendsapartment.com.*

THE A-LISTERS' A-LIST

Mary & Jeff Clarke

Jeff and Mary Clarke know all about top talent. For more than a decade, the husband-and-wife duo have been boosting the careers of local models through their agency, Mother Model Management, which celebrated its 10-year anniversary in November. The Clarkes dished on some of their favorite places and people in St. Louis. **Restaurant: Louie** "The food is always amazing, the service is unmatched, and the atmosphere is warm and inviting." **Guilty Pleasure: Clementine's Naughty and Nice Creamery** "We've actually shipped it to friends in New York for special occasions." **Special Gift: Provisions** in the Central West End, **Urban Matter** on South Grand, and **Sojourn by Joya** at City Foundry STL **Specialty Food, Coffee, and Market Items: AO&Co.** in Tower Grove **Art: Cbabi Bayoc** "We are big fans." **Neighborhood: Midtown** "It's a vibrant community of art, commerce, and creativity."

Photography by **Lindsey Hinderer,** Hair and Makeup by **Jenna Brown**

BEST LUXURY AUTO DEALER

Plaza Motors

Browsing Plaza's lots is an auto enthusiast's dream. Area dealerships specialize in numerous luxury brands, including BMW, Land Rover, Audi, Jaguar, Mercedes-Benz, and Infiniti. *plazamotors.com.*

FINALISTS

Autohaus BMW

RP Exotics

BEST AUTO DEALER (NEW)

Lou Fusz Automotive

With 17 brands, 13 dealerships, and more than 2,000 new and used vehicles, Lou Fusz offers a wide range of new and pre-owned vehicles. *fusz.com.*

FINALISTS

Bommarito

Dave Sinclair

BEST AUTO DEALER (PRE-OWNED)

iAutoAgent

This company helps guide customers through the buying and selling process—much like real estate agents do. It can search for vehicles at below-market price, review dealers, and schedule test drives. For sellers, it provides a guaranteed value of the car within 24 hours. *iautoagent.com.*

FINALISTS

Jim Butler

Lou Fusz Automotive

BEST AUTO REPAIR & MECHANIC

Quality Auto Repair & Tire

At this full-service auto-repair shop in Maryland Heights, certified technicians can tackle any repair and service job, including brakes, suspension, and alignment, as well as computer diagnostics for check-engine lights, ABS systems, and more. *qualityautorepairandtire.com.*

FINALISTS

Len's Auto Repair

Lou Fusz Automotive

BEST RV SALES AND SERVICE

Apache Village RV

Planning a road trip? This full-line RV dealership offers new and used RVs, service, hitching, parts, and accessories. The family-owned and -operated business is stocked with the latest inventory from top manufacturers, such as Jayco, Keystone, and Fleetwood. *apachevillagerv.com.*

FINALISTS

Byerly RV

Campers Inn RV

BEST BODY SCULPTING

Metro MedSpa

Among its many body-sculpting services, Kate Schoemehl's medspa in South County offers such options as CoolSculpting, BodyFx, and Vasculaze. *themetromedspa.com.*

FINALISTS

Nancy Boyer at Arch Beauty Studio LLC / Synergi MedSpa

Photography by **Izaiah Johnson, Miranda Munguia, Lauren Muckler, imagehub88 / iStock / Getty Images Plus / via Getty Images**

BEST BARBER

Abraham Tatman, Midas Barber Studio

Available by appointment only, the award-winning barber offers haircuts, beard trims, perms, hair coloring, facial massages, and more. *instagram.com/the_tat2.*

FINALISTS

Mickey The Barber, Mickey's Hair Co.

Sebastian Tomas, Estilo & Co.

BEST COSMETIC INJECTABLES

Metro MedSpa

When Metro MedSpa's cosmopolitan space in South County opened in 2021, it boasted "St. Louis' first walk-in Botox bar." The spa's smoothing solutions include such options as wrinkle relaxers and dermal fillers. *themetromedspa.com.*

FINALISTS

Skin & Body Bar

Synergi MedSpa

BEST DAY SPA

The Face and The Body Spa

Serving the community for more than 40 years, The Face and The Body offers skincare services, trendy hairstyles, classic nail care, therapeutic massages, and medspa services. It also makes its own products in house for customers. *faceandbodyspa.com.*

FINALISTS

Metro MedSpa

Skin & Body Bar

BEST BEAUTY PRODUCTS

Blu A Color Salon

The Valley Park salon sells shampoos, conditioners, hair oils, and more—all fit for any hair type. Blu carries such brands as Dede, Love Curl, and Melu. *blucolorsalon.com.*

FINALISTS

Christina White Salon

The Color Room

BEST HAIR SALON

Blu A Color Salon

Charles and Nicole Gillick opened the Valley Park spa in 2009. It offers cuts, color, extensions, treatments, facial waxing, and more. *blucolorsalon.com.*

FINALISTS

Christina White Salon

The Hurley Co.

BEST EYELASHES

Christy Leigh Lashes

Christy Leigh specializes in eyelash extensions and natural lash health, and it's certified in classic, volume, and mega volume. Requiring appointments, the cosmetologist offers such services as classic fills, classic full sets, hybrid fills, volume fills, volume full sets, and lash removal and cleansing. *christyleighlashes.com.*

FINALISTS

Cloud9 Beauty

Skylar Edwards

BEST FACIAL/SKIN CARE

Esthetics by Mary Beth Shearn

As a licensed esthetician, founder Mary Beth Shearn is committed to customers' skin and wellness goals. The skincare and wellness provider offers custom facials, Diamond Glow, chemical peels, enhancements, and more. *youniquelygoldenskin.com.*

FINALISTS

Metro MedSpa

Skin & Body Bar

BEST BLOW-DRY BAR

Blu A Color Salon

When a client gets a blowout from Blu A Color Salon, it consists of a shampoo and blow-dry. The stylist will often use a round brush and provide the option to add a heat styling tool. The salon also offers Brazilian blowout services, a three-hour treatment that lasts up to six months. *blucolorsalon.com.*

FINALISTS

Aleksandr Kisseloff

Drybar

BEST HAIR REMOVAL

Metro MedSpa

This medspa's procedure simultaneously fires several wavelengths at the skin to treat hair-removal concerns. The process is typically quick, comfortable, and works for all skin types. *themetromedspa.com.*

FINALISTS

INFINITY Laser Hair Removal & Skin Rejuvenation

Laser Lounge STL

BEST NAIL SALON

Nails by Kathy

Specializing in acrylic enhancements, Kathy Ung offers a variety of creative and intricate designs for all nail shapes. To get an idea of a client's desired style and aesthetic, the professional nail tech recommends bringing nail inspiration photos to an appointment. *instagram.com/nailsbykathyyy.*

FINALISTS

Nailz By Mary

Posh Nail Lounge

feel good
be better

BEST CANNABIS DISPENSARY

Kind Goods Dispensary

Formerly a medical cannabis dispensary, Kind Goods now sells recreational cannabis as well. Options include edibles, extract, flower, pre-rolls, tinctures, vape, and topical products. *thekindgoods.com*.

FINALISTS

Feel State / Proper Cannabis

BEST COSMETIC DERMATOLOGIST

Jason B. Amato, MD, Dermatology

This dermatology practice offers a variety of cosmetic treatments and care, including dermal fillers, Botox, laser skin rejuvenation, physician-grade skincare, and body treatments. *jamatoderm.com*.

FINALISTS

Luciann Hruza, MD, FAAD

Jeffrey Reed, MD

BEST CHIROPRACTOR

Premier Chiropractic

The chiropractors at Premier Chiropractic work with patients to form a plan to decrease pain, optimize athletic performance, and more. Services include chiropractic adjustments, rehabilitation, and passive therapies. *premierchirostl.com*.

FINALISTS

ABChiropractic Family & Wellness

HealthSource Chiropractic

BEST DRIVING RANGE

Topgolf

Not your typical driving range, Topgolf's tech-enabled setup offers fun for both avid golfers and newcomers. Play range games from the comfort of a hitting bay while enjoying food and drinks. *topgolf.com*.

FINALISTS

Family Golf and Learning Center

Tower Tee Golf

BEST AUDIOLOGY CENTER

Gateway ENT

At Gateway ENT, physicians work carefully to diagnose and treat all forms of hearing loss, ranging from impacted earwax to congenital hearing loss, through comprehensive otologic evaluations. *gatewaydrs.com*.

FINALISTS

Sound Health Services

Washington University Adult Audiology at CID

BEST BOUTIQUE FITNESS STUDIO

Barre STL

The barre fitness method pulls from elements of Pilates, yoga, strength training, HIIT, and dance. Barre STL caters to the everyday athlete who wants to rediscover or foster a love of working out. *barrestl.com*.

FINALISTS

Burn Boot Camp

Push Fitness Entertainment

BEST DIETITIAN

Branz Nutrition Counseling

Branz Nutrition Counseling provides intuitive-eating and eating-disorder care for clients through online or in-person nutrition counseling. The team offers weight-inclusive care and an online course. *branznutritioncounseling.com*.

FINALISTS

Nikki Finkenthal

Allison Lesko

BEST TANNING SERVICES

Just Fakin' Tans

This Columbia, Illinois-based tanning company offers mobile airbrush spray tan, eight-hour airbrush tan, rapid airbrush tan, full-body contouring, group parties, and more. *justfakintans.com*.

FINALISTS

Bronzed Beauty Babes

Sunset Skin

Photography by Miranda Mungia, Steve Jett, izusek / E+ / via Getty Images, courtesy of Kind Goods Dispensary

BEST ASSISTED LIVING FACILITY

Friendship Village

With locations in Sunset Hills and Chesterfield, Friendship Village offers homes where residents can live independently, with access to assistance when needed. Friendship Village strives to provide community, enrichment, and quality care. *friendshipvillagestl.com.*

FINALISTS

Breeze Park

Clarendale Clayton

BEST HEALTH FOOD STORE

Fit-Flavors

At Fit-Flavors, customers can purchase fresh, customizable prepared meals from a storefront or have meals delivered. The team plans and cook healthy meals for all diets. *fit-flavors.com.*

FINALISTS

Honey I'm Home Nutritious Foods

J+B Wellness Company

BEST COSMETIC DENTIST

The Dental Studio of Southern Illinois

Located in O'Fallon, Illinois, the Dental Studio of Southern Illinois offers a number of cosmetic treatments, including bonding, porcelain veneers, inlays and onlays, teeth whitening, and Invisalign. *thedentalstudio618.com.*

FINALISTS

Chesterfield Family Dentistry

Concord Dental Group

BEST INDEPENDENT LIVING

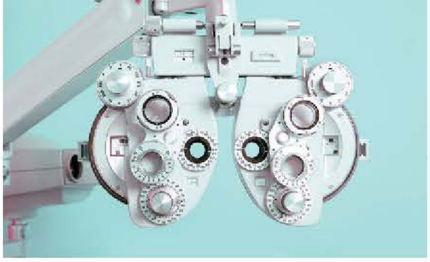
Clarendale Clayton

Clarendale Clayton promises luxurious independent living. You can choose from a variety of floor plans, and all residents have access to a restaurant, a fitness center, and theater. *clarendaleclayton.com.*

FINALISTS

Friendship Village

The Gatesworth



BEST EYE CARE

Image Eye Care

The practice offers a range of eye-health services and uses the latest eyecare technologies. The optometric team provides routine vision tests, thorough eye exams, ocular disease management, dry-eye treatment, specialized pediatric eyecare, and contact and eyeglass options. *imageeyecarestl.com.*

FINALISTS

Kirkwood Eye Associates

Performance Eyecare

BEST FITNESS CENTER

HOTWORX

At the 24-hour fitness studio, members take virtually instructed classes in infrared saunas with room for three users per session. Program options include 30-minute isometric sessions (yoga, Pilates, barre) and 15-minute HIIT workouts (cycling, rowing, total body cardio). *hotworx.net.*

FINALISTS

Burn Boot Camp

Push Fitness Entertainment

BEST GOLF COURSE

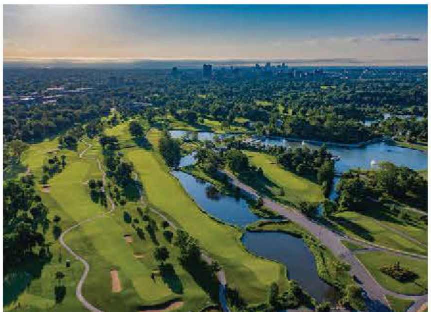
Forest Park Golf Course

Golfers can play one or more of the course's three 9-hole layouts or practice on the putting and chipping greens. Take in the beautiful sights of Forest Park while playing nine or 18 holes on the Hawthorne, Dogwood, and Redbud layouts. *forestparkgc.com.*

FINALISTS

Old Hickory Golf Club

Persimmon Woods Golf Club



BEST ACUPUNCTURE

PALM Health

The Ladue health and wellness center offers a vast range of services in a resort-like environment. PALM Health's acupuncture options, for instance, include classic acupuncture, acupressure, and facial acupuncture. *palmhealth.com.*

FINALISTS

A Wellness Place

HealthSource Chiropractic

BEST HOME HEALTH CARE

AccuCare Home Health Care

Homecare options include respite, companionship, and medical care, as well as errands and housekeeping. AccuCare works around the schedule of you and your loved ones with occasional scheduled care, 24-hour assistance options, and last-minute care. *accucare.com.*

FINALISTS

Assistance Home Care

Friendship Village

BEST HAIR COLORIST

Blu A Color Salon

Whether you want to get your roots touched up, try balayage, or switch to a different color, the salon's stylists will walk you through every step of the way. *blucolorsalon.com.*

FINALISTS

Christina White Salon

Grace Johnson, Grace Extension Lounge

BEST HAIR EXTENSIONS

Blu A Color Salon

With a complimentary consultation required, select extension specialists are available. *blucolorsalon.com.*

FINALISTS

Christina White Salon

Grace Johnson, Grace Extension Lounge

BEST PERSONAL TRAINER

Coach H

The creator of Push Fitness Entertainment's Fitness Parties, Coach H creates an environment that makes working out feel fun and empowering, whether you prefer a boxing class or one-on-one training. *instagram.com/mrtte.*

FINALISTS

Courtney Gerding / Andrew Stevens

BEST SPORTS/ORTHOPEDIC REHAB

Axes Physical Therapy

The team at Axes has experience working with both amateur and professional athletes. Therapists identify and address physical issues and create tailored treatment plans to successfully rehabilitate athletes following acute, overuse injuries, and post-surgical injuries. *axespt.com.*

FINALISTS

More 4 Life Physical Therapy
Springer Physical Therapy

BEST THERAPIST OR MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL

Partners in Wellness

Mental health professionals at Partners in Wellness practice evidence-based therapy, with expertise in treating eating disorders and related issues, such as anxiety. The team also hosts caregiver workshops for parents navigating a child's eating disorder recovery. *partnersinwellnessstl.com.*

FINALISTS

Healing Spaces Psychological Services
Lumen Wellness & Counseling

BEST MEDICAL SPA

Empire Aesthetics Med Spa

Specialists conduct a variety of aesthetic treatments, including Botox, fillers, facials and chemical peels, microneedling, laser hair removal, IV drip, waxing, skincare, airbrush spray tans, teeth whitening, and more. *empiremedspa.com.*

FINALISTS

Metro MedSpa
PALM Health

BEST ORTHODONTIST

Otto Orthodontics

With the top orthodontic technology and techniques, the Otto Orthodontics team prioritizes patient comfort and quality care. The practice offers braces care, Invisalign, surgical orthodontics, whitening, and more. *ottoortho.com.*

FINALISTS

Bankhead Orthodontic Specialists
BOCA Orthodontic + Whitening Studio

BEST PARK (BESIDES FOREST PARK)

Tower Grove Park

The South City park, which turned 150 years old last year, spans 289 acres and includes ornate pavilions, picnic sites, fountains, playgrounds, sports areas, and one of the most popular farmers' markets in town. *towergrovepark.org.*

FINALISTS

Castlewood State Park
Creve Coeur Lake Memorial Park

Photography by **Izaiah Johnson, Trivers**

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Luxury

THE LODGE Overlook Farm's newest accommodation is located in a private area of the farm, away from heavy traffic. It's perfect for a group that wants to stay in conditions that are rustic luxury. The Lodge can accommodate up to 12 guests. Its unique location ensures for a private and scenic stay.

CEDARCREST MANOR Nestled among a cluster of towering cedars and tucked away just up the hill from the city of Clarksville. Built in 1842 by Captain Benjamin Clifford, a prominent riverboat captain, Cedarcrest began its life as a plantation home and quickly became the archetype for a number of houses built in the Mississippi River Valley. Romanesque pool which creates a quiet, and restful place to relax and recharge. Rich with amenities, this enchanting Missouri inn is adorned with antiques and features a fireplace in every room.

RACKHEATH HOUSE Perched atop the hills of the Mississippi River Valley, and situated just a short walk from the Overlook—one of the highest spots along the river. Built in 1860 and restored in 2006 by Nathalie Pettus, this Greek revival-style manor features sprawling grounds, a spacious veranda, and a romantic, flourishing garden filled with gorgeous walking paths. Its accessible, state-of-the art kitchen and elegant dining room provide guests with the ideal place to uncork a bottle of wine or sip a cup of coffee.

BRIDAL COTTAGE An intimate space for couples to get away. Perched above the meadow, surrounded by rolling hills, it provides beautiful views of the sunrise and sunsets. A guest will find a full kitchen and beautifully decorated bedroom creating a weekend you'll never forget!

AVALON HOUSE By far one of the most breath-taking views on the property overlooking the Mississippi River. This home is perfect for retreats of any occasion. Avalon House is fully furnished with four bedrooms, four bathrooms, a kitchen, and a wrap-around deck.

Specific amenities apply to specific inns and rooms. If you ever have any questions or inquiries, don't hesitate to contact us or call us at 573.242.3838 Note: both 1NW at Cedarcrest Manor and Chauncey Room at The Rackheath House are ADA Compliant rooms.

BEST PILATES STUDIO

Premier Pilates St. Louis

The studio hosts a number of Pilates mat, yoga, and tai chi classes, as well as classes featuring some of the newest Pilates equipment in the St. Louis area. *premierpilatesstlouis.com.*

FINALISTS

Boom Pilates

Brick City Yoga

BEST URGENT CARE

Total Access Urgent Care

These centers provide an assortment of services, including treatment of illness and injuries, diagnostic imaging, immunizations, physicals, lab work and testing, and pediatric care. *totalaccessurgentcare.com.*

FINALISTS

Mercy-GoHealth Urgent Care

St. Luke's Urgent Care

BEST YOGA STUDIO

Brick City Yoga

A studio centered on community and accessibility, Brick City Yoga hosts a range of yoga classes (ashtanga, body positive flow, vinyasa, yin, and more) for customers of all experience levels. *brickcityyogastl.com.*

FINALISTS

Blue Sky Yoga

South River Yoga

BEST HIKING SPOT

Castlewood State Park

The popular hiking destination includes several trails with views alongside and above the Meramec River. Hilly trails feature lookout points of rocky limestone and picturesque ruins. *mostateparks.com/park/castlewood-state-park.*

FINALISTS

Powder Valley Conservation Nature Center

Rockwoods Reservation

BEST WELLNESS CENTER

Origin Wellness

Services at Origin Wellness cater to the spirit, mind, and body with solo and one-on-one provider treatments. Popular treatments include airwave compression therapy massage, cryotherapy, and iso float. *originwellnessstl.com.*

FINALISTS

ABChiropractic Family & Wellness

Brick City Wellness

BEST PHYSICAL THERAPY/REHAB

Axes Physical Therapy

Patients receive individualized care from experienced physical therapists who aim to improve patient movement and function, facilitate recovery following surgery or acute or chronic injury, and help patients return to their usual lifestyles. *axespt.com.*

FINALISTS

Athletico Physical Therapy

Springer Physical Therapy

BEST MEDICAL WEIGHT LOSS CLINIC

PALM Health

Members can set up nutrition consultations, as well as counseling and meal planning sessions to set goals and develop a program. Non-members can enroll in the "Balanced Living Program" to reset weight management through movement, stress reduction, and nutrition. *palmhealth.com.*

FINALISTS

Evora Women's Health

SSM Health Weight Management Services

BEST LASER EYE TREATMENT

Brinton Vision

A specialty refractive practice entirely focused on laser vision correction, the Brinton Vision team treats thousands of patients every year through LASIK and its modern variations. *brintonvision.com.*

FINALISTS

Ophthalmology Associates

Tekwani Vision Center

BEST MASSAGE

PALM Health

A massage from PALM won't disappoint. Personalized and signature massages for members last between 45 and 120 minutes. Depending on your needs, you may select a stress reduction, lymphatic restorative, maternity, salt stone, or deep tissue massage. *palmhealth.com.*

FINALISTS

Haman's Healing Hands

MassageLuXe

Photography by **Dru Wallace, StarZImages / E+, DeanDrobot / iStock / Getty Images Plus / via Getty Images**

THERE'S A LOT MORE RIDING ON METRO THAN PEOPLE.
NEONATAL NURSE at Children's Hospital
BARISTA at Kaldi's Coffee who makes the best latte foam art
STUDENT at Washington University who works concessions at Enterprise Center
PEDIATRIC RESIDENT who you saw when your child had an ear infection
JEANICE, the MetroLink Operator who always smiles and waves
M
metro
SITEMAN
RIDE ON to healthy communities

BEST ANTIQUE AND VINTAGE SHOP

St. Louis Estate Buyers

This estate liquidator offers appraisals, online estate sales, and more. It also operates retail stores in West County Center and South County Center stocked with inventory from estate buyouts. *stlouisestatebuyers.com.*

FINALISTS

Emporium St. Louis
The Green Shag Market

BEST HOME BUILDER

McBride Homes

Founded by Joseph C. McBride in 1945, McBride has become the state's largest homebuilder. Today, it boasts a 10,000-square-foot showroom in Chesterfield, which features more than a dozen displays and galleries. *mcbridehomes.com.*

FINALISTS

Fischer & Frichtel Homes
KBuild

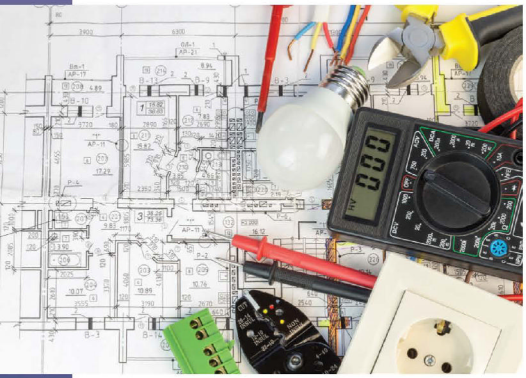
BEST ELECTRICIAN

Streib Company

The full-service electric, media, security, and systems contractor handles residential, commercial, and industrial electrical projects. The company also operates an electrical training and apprenticeship program showcased on the "Streib Tribe" section of its website. *streibco.com.*

FINALISTS

Extreme Electrical Contractors
Reinhold Electric



BEST FURNITURE STORE

The White Hare

Operated by a mother-daughter team, The White Hare features furniture, home décor, floral arrangements, and gifts. The Cottleville store also offers in-home accessorizing services. Check its Facebook page for the latest inventory and specials. *thewhitehare.com.*

FINALISTS

Carol House Furniture / Emporium St. Louis

BEST HEATING & AIR CONDITIONING COMPANY

Hoffmann Brothers

The residential and commercial heating, air-conditioning, plumbing, and electrical company has been serving St. Louis for more than 40 years—and has expanded to Nashville. *hoffmannbros.com.*

FINALISTS

Air Comfort Service Inc.
Design Aire Heating & Cooling

BEST FLOORING RETAILER

Volume Carpet

Serving St. Louis since 1945, Volume Carpet showcases a broad selection of area rugs and carpeting in its showroom, situated in the design- and resale-shop-heavy area along Manchester Road. *volumecarpet.com.*

FINALISTS

Beseda Flooring & More
Boardwalk Hardwood Floors

Photography by **Miranda Munguia, Lurii Garmash / iStock / Getty Images Plus/ via Getty Images**

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helpingpeople.org

BEST HOME LANDSCAPING

All Seasons Maintenance Services

In addition to traditional services (seasonal cleanup, tree trimming, turf maintenance, and irrigation), All Seasons also has concrete services, excavation, and retaining wall construction. *allseasonsmo.com.*

FINALISTS

B&B Tree and Landscapes

Frisella Landscape Group

BEST HOME LIGHTING

Metro Lighting

Besides selling lighting, furniture, ceiling fans, and home accents (with many items offering a price-match guarantee), Metro provides services including energy audits, lighting design, and lamp and furniture repair. *metrolightingcenters.com.*

FINALISTS

Emporium St. Louis

Frisella Outdoor Lighting

BEST GARDEN STORE/NURSERY

Chalily

Named for the owners' children, Charles and Lily, Chalily offers fountains, filtration, fish, and everything else that homeowners might need to achieve the dream of "celebrating water in the garden." In addition to its retail offerings, Chalily also provides water feature design, construction, and maintenance, as well as equipment rental for do-it-yourselfers. *chalily.com.*

FINALISTS

Frisella Nursery

Rolling Ridge Nursery

BEST HOME RESALE SHOP

Miriam Switching Post

Miriam Switching Post specializes in upscale furniture, home décor, and collectibles at its immaculately maintained shop in Brentwood. All proceeds go to Miriam's variable tuition program, which helps cover costs for some of the school's students. *miriamstl.org/miriam-switching-post.*

FINALISTS

Emporium St. Louis

Habitat ReStore

BEST HOUSE CLEANING

Better Life Maids

Founded by husband-and-wife team Angela and Matt Ricketts, Better Life offers scheduled house cleaning, plus specialty services such as deep cleaning, which includes hand-washing woodwork and baseboards. *betterlifemaids.com.*

FINALISTS

Green Angel Cleaning

Two Ladies & A Bucket

BEST HOME ORGANIZATION

Saint Louis Closet Co.

Jennifer Williams' award-winning business goes beyond creating custom closets. Designers can help clients achieve storage solutions for any space, including laundry rooms, pantries, home offices, and craft rooms. *stlouisclosetco.com.*

FINALISTS

Goldilocks Solutions

RizeUp to Organized

BEST MOVING COMPANY

Two Men and a Truck

Despite its recognizable name and logo, this full-service local- and long-distance moving company offers a lot more, including packing services and supplies, junk removal, and storage solutions. *twomenandatruck.com.*

FINALISTS

BEK Moving Co.

McGuire Moving and Storage

BEST HOME APPLIANCE STORE

Slyman Bros Appliances

In business since 1965, founding partners Bob and Harry Slyman made names for themselves and their business in commercials that often showcased olive-green appliances, the brothers' '70s styles, and the tagline "Try us—you'll like us." Today, the company operates five locations and boasts "at least one Slyman in every store" of the family-owned business. *slymanbros.com.*

FINALISTS

The Appliance Discounters

Lemcke TV & Appliance

BEST PAINTING COMPANY

Kennedy Painting

Serving St. Louis since 1998, Kennedy Painting takes on jobs both big and small, offering everything from commercial painting to exterior painting, carpentry, pressure washing, and painter-for-a-day services. *stlouishousepainting.com.*

FINALISTS

House of Paint & Design Co

OnDemand Painters

Photography by **Kevin A. Roberts, Julieanne Birch / E+, janssenkruseproductions / iStock / Getty Images Plus/ via Getty Images**

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BEST ANIMAL HOSPITAL

MetroVet

Dr. Seth Williams takes a modern approach to the practice, from the interior's sleek design (including a wall-to-wall window that allows pet owners to observe the treatment area) to comforting details (refreshments and calming music) to customer-friendly technology (mobile check-in and online appointment booking). *metrovetstl.com.*

FINALISTS

The Pet Doctor / Premier Pet Care

BEST KITCHEN AND BATH REMODELER

Morganco Design Build

Morganco's process starts with a visit from the company's founder and chief builder, Luke Morgan. In addition to being a licensed general contractor, Morgan is a certified building inspector, who can help spot existing issues that could impact cost and construction. *morgancousa.com.*

FINALISTS

Anne Marie Design Studio

Mosby Building Arts

BEST REAL ESTATE AGENT

Robertson Pecher Seymour Real Estate Team

Named for its three partners, this Coldwell Banker team closed more than $48 million in sales last year on homes from a wide swath of the metro area. *rpsreteam.com.*

FINALISTS

Liz Bruch, Compass Realty

Jamie Porter, Fox and Riley Real Estate

BEST PLUMBING

Hoffmann Brothers

The family-owned firm provides sewer and drain services, water treatment, toilet repair, and more. (Case in point: they also took the top spot for heating and air-conditioning.) *hoffmannbros.com.*

FINALISTS

Anton's Plumbing, Heating/Cooling & Energy Experts

Byrd Plumbing

BEST WINDOWS AND DOORS

Chaney Windows and Doors

Chaney sells and installs entry doors, patio doors, storm doors, and eye-catching windows. Customers can also check out an extensive gallery on the company's website. *chaneywindowsanddoors.com.*

FINALISTS

Mosby Building Arts

Windows Doors & More

Photography by **Miranda Munguia**

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BEST BOOKSTORE

The Novel Neighbor

Holland Saltsman's independent bookstore welcomes people of all backgrounds and ages. The Webster Groves store sells books, locally made art, and curated gifts for readers. The community atmosphere makes it an ideal place to explore new books and revisit old ones. *thenovelneighbor.com*.

FINALISTS

Betty's Books
Left Bank Books

BEST BED & BREAKFAST

Old Vine Bed and Breakfast

Wine connoisseurs Mike and Chad Walton traded big-city living for the serene countryside. With related experience, they discovered this historic property and decided to bring a chic bed and breakfast to the heart of Hermann. *oldvinebnb.com*.

FINALISTS

Lemp Mansion
Tuxedo Park STL Bed & Breakfast Inn

BEST BANK

Simmons Bank

What began as a hometown bank has grown to more than 200 locations. This "community bank with scale," takes as much pride in relationships as it does in its products and services. *simmonsbank.com*.

FINALISTS

Commerce Bank
US Bank

BEST CREDIT UNION

First Community Credit Union

Missouri's largest credit union offers an abundance of financial services, including personal loans, student accounts, business loans, personal checking, and more. *firstcommunity.com*.

FINALISTS

Together Credit Union
Vantage Credit Union

BEST DRY CLEANER/ALTERATIONS

American Cleaners

For more than 50 years, the family-owned business has been providing dry cleaning, shirt laundry, bridal gown cleaning/preservation, and more. It also has same-day service for most dry-cleanable garments. *americancleanersstl.com*.

FINALISTS

Anthony's Tailoring
DeMun Professional Cleaners

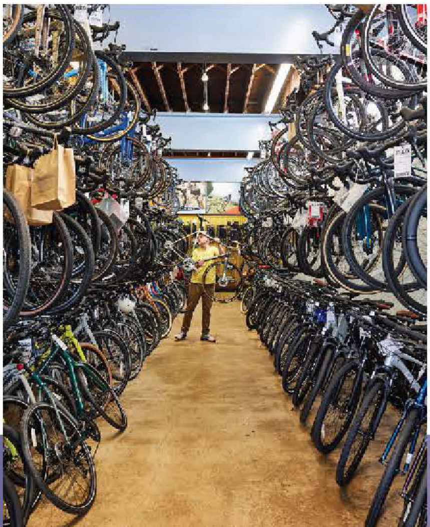
BEST BICYCLE SHOP

Big Shark Bicycle Company

Big Shark's stores are stocked with bikes, parts, and accessories for the whole family. The company offers bicycle classes and opportunities for people who want more experience to join bike teams or clubs. *bigshark.com*.

FINALISTS

The Bike Center
South Side Cyclery



BEST FLORIST

Walter Knoll Florist

Stop and smell the roses. Or the peonies. Or the hydrangeas. Or, really, whatever flower you'd like! The longtime florist offers a colorful, capacious ensemble that you can curate for any special occasion. *wkf.com*.

FINALISTS

Kirkwood Florist
The Flower Stop

sammysoap
FRESH HOT BREAD

BEST GIFT STORE

SammySoap

This Kirkwood shop creates more than just handmade, all-natural soaps. It also stocks other gifts and, perhaps best of all, creates jobs for adults with disabilities.*sammysoap.com*.

FINALISTS

Cat's Meow Personalized Gifts
Old Vine Kitchen Emporium

BEST PEST CONTROL

Rottler Pest Solutions

This family firm now has a fleet of more than 200 service vehicles, a staff of more than 220, and nine locations across St. Louis, Springfield, Kansas City, Columbia, and Jefferson City. Rottler can help homeowners get rid of everything from termites to racoons and rodents. *rottler.com*.

FINALISTS

Buckingham Pest Control
Vogelsang Pest Management

Photography by **Kevin A. Roberts, Izaiah Johnson**

Discover a Place to Call Home

Voted St. Louis Magazine's Top Independent Living Community, The Watermark at St. Peters is an intimate and welcoming resort-like community with a modern and comfortable vibe. Newly renovated, explore the incredible, chic space that is reminiscent of a modern farmhouse. Experience living in luxury with an on-site lively lounge and bar, salon, swim club, theater, and so much more. Think you know senior living? Come see for yourself – you'll be amazed.

StLouis MAGAZINE TOP SENIOR CARE Research conducted by DataJoe ★ 2023 ★

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BEST PET GROOMER

Yuppy Puppy

Staffed 24 hours per day, the luxurious facility offers haircuts, bath and neaten, and maintenance brushing. The groomers are professionally trained and certified in pet first aid. *yuppypuppyspa.com*.

FINALISTS

Keck's Haven LLC

Kennelwood Pet Resorts

BEST PET BOARDING

Kennelwood Pet Resorts

Donald Danforth Jr. opened the first Kennelwood location in St. Louis nearly 50 years ago. Today, the family-owned business spans multiple metro-area locations and aims to provide a safe, enriching environment where pets can feel at home, whether for an extended period or just for a weekend. *kennelwood.com*.

FINALISTS

Country Acres

Yuppy Puppy

BEST LOCAL HOTEL

Cheshire Inn

Home to Basso and the Fox & Hounds Tavern, this historic hotel mixes British aesthetics with modern comfort. The hotel itself includes 108 rooms and suites, as well as such amenities as an outdoor pool, pet-friendly rooms, and a giant outdoor chess set. *cheshirestl.com*.

FINALISTS

Angad Arts Hotel

Moonrise Hotel

BEST SWIMMING POOL SERVICES

Baker Pool Construction and Service

In addition to providing pool and spa maintenance services, Baker regularly offers "pool school" classes on the basics of chlorine and salt-water pool care. *stlouispoolconstruction.com*.

FINALISTS

Pool Specialists / Prestige Pool

BEST INSURANCE AGENT

Kyle Dillehay, Dillehay Insurance Agency

Dillehay's St. Peters–based agency assists customers with a variety of insurance options: home, auto, life, renters, business, general, and more. *dillehayinsurance.com*.

FINALISTS

Kirk D. Faubel Insurance Agency

Rachel Williams–State Farm

BEST ACTIVEWEAR

Alpine Shop

The store began more than four decades ago as a small climbing shop. Today, it caters to all sorts of outdoor activities (camping, climbing, cycling, paddling, running, snow sports) and offers apparel, footwear, and accessories. *alpineshop.com*.

FINALISTS

Big River Running

REI

BEST OUTDOOR OUTFITTERS

Alpine Shop

Outdoor enthusiasts flock to Alpine Shop to gear up for hiking, biking, skiing, and more. With locations in Kirkwood, Chesterfield, and beyond, each store carries apparel, footwear, and accessories to accommodate just about any adventure. And for those getting started, Alpine Shop has courses on such topics as backpacking, bike maintenance, and paddling. *alpineshop.com*.

FINALISTS

Bass Pro Shops

REI

Alpine shop ltd.

Photography by **Izaiah Johnson**, courtesy of **Cheshire Inn, Wolfe Architecture & Design**

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BEST PHOTOGRAPHER

Stephanie Mueller Photography

Mueller is an award-winning photographer who's photographed more than 500 newborns during her career and specializes in baby's first year and maternity photos. *stephaniemuellerphotography.com*.

FINALISTS

BTP by Alison / Lemon Cherry Photography

BEST SHOPPING CENTER

West County Center

The Des Peres mall has more than 100 shops, including Apple, Nordstrom, and LEGO, in addition to the food court, J. Gilbert's, and seasonal offerings. *shopwestcountycenter.com*.

FINALISTS

City Foundry STL

Plaza Frontenac

BEST LOCALLY OWNED CLOTHING STORE

Alpine Shop

The whole family can suit up for any adventure with the shop's wide selection of apparel, from swimwear to gloves to jackets. *alpineshop.com*.

FINALISTS

Kangaroo Kids

Hazel and Blues

BEST RECORD STORE

Vintage Vinyl

The black-and-white marquee is a fixture along the Delmar Loop. The record shop carries every imaginable genre of music, from hip-hop to country, folk to world music, and the expert staff can help you navigate the myriad options. Consider carrying those albums out in a Vintage Vinyl tote. *vintagevinyl.com*.

FINALISTS

Euclid Records

Record Exchange

VINTAGE VINYL
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BEST MORTGAGE

Fairway Mortgage

Steven Jacobson founded Fairway Mortgage in April 1996. Today, it's grown to more than 650 branches and 6,800-plus team members and has won multiple "Top Workplaces" awards. The company provides many kinds of loans and boasts "offering some of the fastest turn times in the industry." *fairwayindependentmc.com*.

FINALISTS

First Community Credit Union

Flat Branch Home Loans

BEST FINANCIAL ADVISOR

Rob Read

Read has ample experience as a financial-planning strategist, business consultant, and business owner. In 2019, he founded CWR Private Client Group, which helps clients create a roadmap to retirement. As someone focused on long-term goals, it's perhaps fitting that he trains for Ironman triathlons in his spare time. *cwrpcg.com*.

FINALISTS

ARK Financial Wellness

Visionary Wealth Advisors

BEST JEWELER

Adler's Diamonds

At their Des Peres store, fourth-generation jewelers and sisters Danielle Adler Estes and Jessica Adler Gerring sell engagement rings, wedding bands, and fine jewelry, including such designer brands as S. Kashi & Sons, Bridal Bells, and Ashi. *adlersdiamonds.com*.

FINALISTS

Fire and Facet Studios

Lindwedel Jewelers

Photography by **Stephanie Mueller Photography, Izaiah Johnson, Jezperklauzen / iStock / Getty Images Plus / via Getty Images**

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BEST VETERINARIAN

Dr. Praveena Kolli, Brentwood Animal Hospital

A graduate of the University of Missouri, Dr. Praveena Kolli specializes in all aspects of small-animal medicine, including dermatology, soft-tissue surgery, and physical rehabilitation. *brentwoodanimalhospital.com.*

FINALISTS

Dr. Emily Goyda, MetroVet / Dr. Marcy Hammerle, Pet Doctor

BEST PET SITTER OR DAYCARE

Keck's Haven LLC

Veterinarian-owned and -operated, Keck's Haven offers pet-sitting that consists of 20–60 minutes of playing, feeding, cleaning, and more. It provides dog walks for up to an hour and overnight stays. The sitters also send real-time photos and updates to owners. *keckshaven.com.*

FINALISTS

Kennelwood Pet Resorts

Yuppy Puppy

BEST RESALE AND CONSIGNMENT SHOP

Society of St. Vincent de Paul Thrift Store

When you shop, donate, or volunteer at the thrift stores, it helps the Society of St. Vincent de Paul provide low-cost and no-cost goods to those in need. There are nine area locations, as well as dozens of donation bins across the region. *svdpstlouis.org.*

FINALISTS

Fantastic Finds

NCJW Resale Shop

BEST WEDDING ENTERTAINMENT

My Friend Mike Band

Lead vocalist Mike Schlipp and company have performed at major venues across town. The band pulls from many genres, from the latest hits to Motown classics. *contemporary productions.com.*

FINALISTS

Complete Weddings + Events

DJ Cole Coleman

BEST PET TRAINER/OBEDIENCE SCHOOL

PetImpact!

This school's training approach uses non-confrontational methods and positive reinforcement. Training options include puppy, beginner, intermediate, advanced, tricks, and customized programs. *petimpact.com.*

FINALISTS

Kennelwood Pet Resorts

Yuppy Puppy

BEST SHOE STORE

Laurie's Shoes

Everyone can walk out in style at Laurie's, which stocks sneakers, boots, dress shoes, and more. The store emphasizes service and gives customers the option to make an appointment with a pedorthist. Adults appreciate the trunk shows, while kids love the play area. *lauriesshoes.com.*

FINALISTS

Big River Running Company

Running Niche

BEST PET STORE

Treats Unleashed

This is your one-stop shop for all-natural pet food, fresh-baked treats, custom pet cakes, grooming and self-wash, as well as quality dog and cat toys, collars, beds, pet supplies, and more. *treats-unleashed.com.*

FINALISTS

Four Muddy Paws

Pet Supplies Plus

Photography by **Miranda Munguia**

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Mia Grace
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BEST TRAVEL AGENCY

Sky High Travel

With its mantra of "making the world a smaller place," this travel agency can plan a vacation for any stage of life. Schedule an in-person meeting or request a call with one of its experienced advisors for a free quote. *shtravelteam.com.*

FINALISTS

Altair Travel

Jan's Travel and Cruise

BEST TATTOO SHOP

Permanent Vacation

Walk-ins are welcome at this St. Charles tattoo shop, which is open every day. Founder Joe Cumbee and the shop's other artists offer a wide range of options, including traditional Japanese and American tattoos. *permanentvacationtattoo.com.*

FINALISTS

Iron Age

Pastel Devil Studio

BEST WEDDING HOTELS AND LODGING

Ameristar Casino Resort Spa St. Charles

Ameristar Casino Resort Spa is known for its gaming and entertainment, but it's also a popular place for wedding guests to retreat after a long night. The facility offers a range of event spaces, dining options, and rooms. *ameristarstcharles.com.*

FINALISTS

Hotel Saint Louis

Le Meridien St. Louis Clayton

BEST WEDDING HAIR

Posh Beauty

With more than 30 freelance hair stylists and makeup artists, Posh Beauty can help ensure brides-to-be and bridesmaids will be ready for the big day. It offers on-site hair and makeup services, as well as in-studio services at its St. Peters location. *poshbeautyco.net.*

FINALISTS

The Color Room

EYE DO STL

BEST WEDDING PLANNER

Cultivated Events Co.

Marisa Douty and Molly Reiher strive to help create the perfect day. They offer a range of services, from an inclusive package to day-of coordination to a cultivated coffee (or cocktails) consultation. *cultivatedevents.co.*

FINALISTS

K.Hart Events | Design + Planning

LZ Event Co.

BEST WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHER

The Youngs Photo + Film

A husband-and-wife team, Alex and Veronica Young have captured stirring photography and video of myriad couples' special days. *theyoungsphoto.com.*

FINALISTS

Derek Coffman Photography

Leave It To Beaver Photography

BEST WEDDING MAKEUP

Posh Beauty

Nikki Creacy's agency offers on-site services, as well as in-studio beauty services: hair, makeup, airbrush spray tan, brow tint and lamination, lash extensions, lash lifts and tints, and more. *poshbeautyco.net.*

FINALISTS

Brooke A. Mulholland Makeup Artistry LLC

Elizabeth Wolf MUA

BEST WEDDING FORMALWEAR

Savvy Bridal STL

The Lafayette Square boutique offers appointment-only visits, when professional stylists can help find that perfect wedding gown or accessory. Choose from such designers as Allure, Eva Lendel, Martin Thornburg, and more. And during "off-the-rack" bridal appointments, customers can possibly take home a dress the same day at an affordable price. *savvybridalboutique.com.*

FINALISTS

Boulevard Bride

Men's Wearhouse

BEST WEDDING RENTALS

Weinhardt Party Rentals

Founded in 1946, the family-owned company provides full-service event rentals, such as tables, linens, china, tents, dance floors, and more. Looking for design inspiration? Book an appointment, or check out the website's gallery. *weinhardtpartyrentals.com.*

FINALISTS

Something Bléu

Styled + Staged STL

Photography by **Wesley Law, The Youngs Photo + Film,** courtesy

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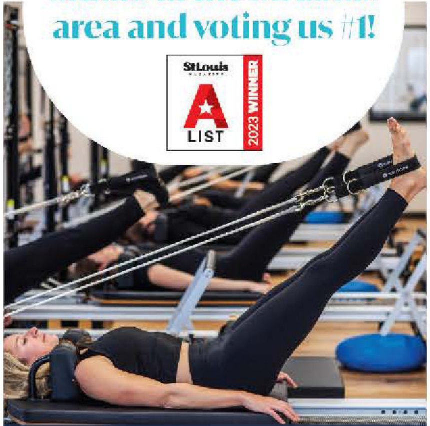

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BEST WEDDING CAKES AND DESSERTS

Made. by Lia

After winning Season 4 of TLC's *Next Great Baker*, Lia Weber opened her own bakery in Old Town Florissant in 2020. As she told SLM, "I'm really passionate about investing in our community and making the best of every area we can in St. Louis." *madebylia.com.*

FINALISTS

Cake House Design
The Cakery Bakery

BEST WEDDING FLORIST

Rouge Floral Design

Owner Katie Hackmann and her team specialize in wedding florals, though the Cottleville floral shop also offers everyday florals and holiday arrangements. One fun idea: a DIY-style pop-up stem bar for weddings and bridal showers, so guests can take home their very own colorful arrangements. *rougefloraldesign.com.*

FINALISTS

Moody Blooms and Meditations
Roses & Mint Floral

BEST WEDDING VIDEOGRAPHER

The Youngs Photo + Film

Looking for a way to remember what can feel like a whirlwind day? Capture it on video. The Youngs' website offers an extensive range of galleries and videos, and their YouTube channel is a glimpse into their playful-but-professional approach. *theyoungsphoto.com.*

FINALISTS

CMS Photography + Film
K-Build Media

BEST WEDDING TRANSPORTATION

JED Transportation

Founded in 1967, JED Transportation is the largest luxury transportation company in St. Louis. Its fleet includes an array of limousines, buses, sedans, SUVs, motor coaches, and more. *jedlimousine.com.*

FINALISTS

Platinum Transportation
STL Crew Shuttle

BEST WEDDING VENUE

Public School House

Constructed in 1875, this one-room schoolhouse is a perfect venue for a rustic wedding. There's a large wraparound bar, an outdoor stone fireplace, and two patios on just over an acre in Cottleville. *publicschoolhouse.com.*

FINALISTS

Loveland Estates
Sunflower Hill Farm

BEST WEDDING STATIONERY

Simply Torn Art & Design

Christa Pfile Gleich's company captures the essence of weddings with elegant, professional stationery by marrying tailored design with thoughtfully curated paper, ribbon, and foil. *simplytornart.com.*

FINALISTS

Artfully Overjoyed
On Three Designs

BEST WEDDING CATERER

Sugarfire Smoke House Catering

Make your wedding reception extra memorable with some St. Louis barbecue. Sugarfire Smoke House Catering serves up its award-winning 'cue, including baby back ribs, juicy beef brisket, and more. *sugarfiresmokehouse.com/catering.*

FINALISTS

Butler's Pantry
Russo's Catering

BEST WEDDING DRESS BOUTIQUE

Mia Grace Bridal

The Chesterfield bridal store offers more than 1,000 designer gowns (with such collections as Astrid and Mercedes, Casablanca, Eddy K, and others) and 500-plus bridesmaid dresses (such as B2 by Jasmine and Morilee) in sizes 2–32. *miagracebridal.com.*

FINALISTS

Boulevard Bride
Signature Bridal

Photography by Kevin A. Roberts, Tabitazn / iStock / Getty Images Plus / via Getty Images, courtesy of Public School House

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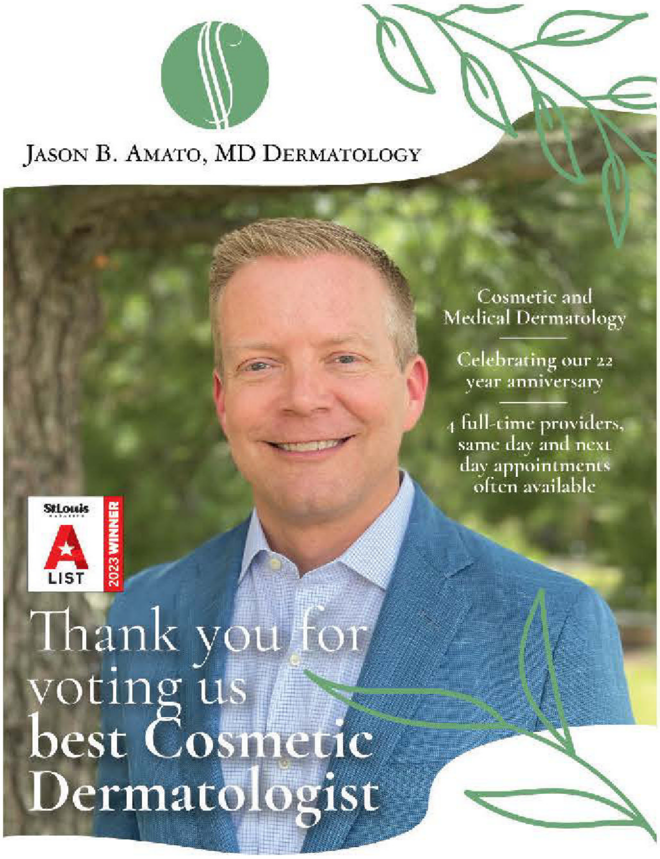

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A-LIST AWARDS 2023

VISIONARY AWARD

Carolyn Kindle

During a visit to St. Louis in March 2019, Major League Soccer commissioner Don Garber tried to see the future. But he really had to squint. Garber was in town on a fact-finding mission, meeting with local luminaries to determine whether the region had the appropriate corporate backing to support a team in his expanding league. Finances weren't his only concern. Garber wanted to see the site where a potential expansion team might build its home. For that, the leaders of MLS4theLou, the ownership group determined to lure a franchise to town, brought Garber to Downtown West.

Carolyn Kindle, a leader in MLS4theLou's push to bring North America's top-flight soccer league to town, showed him the pocked grass and ghostly quiet highway ramp that cut through the undulating hilly patch of land between Market and Olive where they intended to build the stadium. As he surveyed the scene, Garber turned to Kindle for reassurance.

"This is a highway offramp," Garber said, with a hint of incredulity. "You're telling me that you're going to have a stadium, a training facility, and your headquarters here?"

"That's exactly what I'm telling you," Kindle responded.

In merely a few years' time, Kindle has delivered on that promise. It hasn't happened without headaches, tears, and unforeseen delays, but St. Louis CITY SC, now midway through its inaugural season, is quickly taking its place as a community pillar. The 29th team to join MLS, CITY is the toast of the league after becoming the first expansion franchise to win each of its first five games. Off the field, the opening of CITYPARK, a 22,500-seat stadium, has boosted the profile of Downtown West, where matchdays bring a buzzing, festival-like atmosphere to the neighborhood.

As the head of the first majority-women ownership group in MLS history, which includes several members of her extended Taylor family, Kindle has steered the club from conception to contender, providing the St. Louis region with a new point of civic pride.

"This [stadium] redeveloped an area in this community that didn't have a whole lot going on," Garber says. "And I think that's awesome."

Kindle, whose family founded Enterprise Rent-A-Car, admits she didn't know anything about soccer when she joined the MLS4theLou project several years ago. But she did have insights into leading a successful business. The president of the Enterprise Holdings Foundation, Kindle approached the role of soccer franchise steward with leadership principles she gleaned from her kin: Be patient, ask for help, and show gratitude.

Those guiding ideas shaped the way that Kindle has navigated the past four years. After MLS awarded the expansion team to St. Louis in 2019, the league pushed back the club's debut from 2022 to 2023 due to the pandemic. The planned opening of CITYPARK, which sits on a $458 million compound that includes a state-of-the-art training facility—the Washington University Orthopedics High Performance Center—was also delayed several weeks after a construction mishap last September caused flooding that led to serious electrical damage.

During those difficult fall days when the extent and ramifications of the damage were unclear even to those in CITY's front office, Kindle leaned on anyone who would listen. That group ranged from fellow MLS owners; to her mother, Jo Ann Taylor Kindle; to the team's burgeoning fan base.

"When the water issue happened, there was a nice lady at CVS who was so concerned about me," Kindle says. "I didn't even know this woman, and she walked up to me to say, 'We are so proud of you. We just want your stadium fixed.' Another woman at Schnucks one day had me in tears while she thanked me. So many people have been so polite. Things like that make you want to work hard every single day."

Repairs to CITYPARK were made in time for the club to open the stadium last November for an international exhibition between the developmental squad St. Louis CITY 2 and Bayer 04 Leverkusen of the elite German Bundesliga. The revelry that night was a preview of how the Downtown West neighborhood would be reinvigorated. The area has been buoyed by new development since the first wave of construction began on the stadium site in early 2020. Across from CITYPARK on Market, the Irish pub Maggie O'Brien's recently completed extensive renovations to welcome more stadium-going fans, and a new soccer-themed sports bar, The Pitch Athletic Club and Tavern, opened catty-corner to the facility inside Union Station in March.

There's more development still to come. Renovations to the historic Butler Brothers building, located around the corner at 18th and Olive, are expected to be complete later this year. It will feature upward of 400 apartments, along with additional retail spaces. No matter what future holds for further developments in the area, the investment is already paying off.

"It was a goal from Day 1 to activate Downtown West," Kindle says. "Seeing that come to fruition, whether it's the block parties the night before a match or the events outside, it's so exciting to see families come down here, and celebrate and create new memories."

Photography by **Kevin A. Roberts**

Leslie Gill + Ali Hogan

RUNG FOR WOMEN

When the career accelerator Rung for Women, founded by Hogan, launched during the pandemic, it was a lifeline for women who had been pushed out of the workforce to supervise their kids' learning while schools closed down to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Now, Rung and Gill, its president, are focusing on training women for geospatial and tech jobs. (A recent webinar, for instance, focused on using transferable skills to pivot to tech.) With Next NGA West's impending opening, it's an important opportunity to grow the number of women working in the field. *rungforwomen.org.*

Emily Lohse-Busch

39 NORTH AGTECH

Seven regional organizations united to form the 39 North AgTech Innovation District to level up St. Louis' work in ag tech, and they turned to one woman to lead it: Lohse-Busch, the former director of Arch Grants. 39 North will focus on bringing together the talent and resources to grow St. Louis' ag tech economy and the region's reputation in the field. *39northstl.org.*

Moji Sidiqi

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ST. LOUIS

In 2021, St. Louis welcomed many refugees from Afghanistan. Now, the International Institute is supporting new residents with a community center in Tower Grove South, led by Afghan Community Development Program Manager Sidiqi, where the resettled Afghans can learn English, take drivers' ed, and access mental health programs. *iistl.org.*

Kristen Sorth

ST. LOUIS COUNTY LIBRARY

As director and CEO of St. Louis County Library, Sorth introduced social workers at branches, a popular GrandPad program, and a Small Business Launchpad for formerly incarcerated people—and those are only some of the system's most recent initiatives. *slcl.org.*

Mike England

ST. MARY'S SOUTHSIDE CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

After the Archdiocese of St. Louis announced that it intended to close the all-boys high school, current students and parents, generations of graduates, and residents of the Dutchtown neighborhood, where the school is located, rallied around England, its president. England had an ambitious plan to raise the money necessary to keep the school open independently. Less than a year later, the school signed a lease with the archdiocese to stay in its current building and operate independently as St. Mary's Southside Catholic High School. *stmaryshs.com.*

Photography by Wesley Law

Lesley S. Hoffarth

FOREST PARK FOREVER

Big changes are coming to Forest Park with the addition of basketball courts and a reimagined all-seasons Steinberg Pavilion and Rink. Lesley Hoffarth, Forest Park Forever's president and executive director, says making the new Steinberg a welcoming place for everyone will be crucial, especially because it was one of the first racially integrated public spaces in the city. "This should be a space that is open and accessible to everyone in the community," Hoffarth says. *forestparkforever.org.*

Gabe Angieri

ARCH GRANTS

Emily Lohse-Busch's successor at Arch Grants wants to double down on the organization's work in helping startups owned by people of color take their businesses to the next level. Since 2012, Arch Grants has funded more than 200 companies, 70 percent of which are co-owned by a POC, woman, immigrant, or veteran. *archgrants.org.*

Susan Trautman

GREAT RIVERS GREENWAY

As CEO of Great Rivers Greenway, Trautman leads one of the boldest initiatives in St. Louis: to connect our car-obsessed communities via a series of greenways—and to encourage St. Louisans to get out and use them. Now you can visit two recently opened greenway projects, Brickline Greenway at CityPark and Katherine Ward Burg Garden, part of the Mississippi Greenway on Laclede's Landing. *greatriversgreenway.org.*

Richard Liekweg + Orvin Kimbrough

BJC HEALTHCARE + MIDWEST BANKCENTRE

One of the most innovative partnerships we've seen recently targeting the unfair disparities among white and Black St. Louisans: BJC HealthCare CEO Liekweg joined forces with Midwest BankCentre chairman and CEO Kimbrough. BJC deposited money in branches of the bank tied to 20-plus ZIP codes where low-to-moderate-income customers live. The banks can do more lending to these clients, who are traditionally viewed as "riskier" borrowers, for things like home loans and business loans. "If you think about how you create wealth, it's homeownership, and it's having money to start or scale a small business," Kimbrough told *SLM*. *midwestbankcentre.com; bjc.org.*

Yemi Akande-Bartsch

FOCUS ST. LOUIS

In a city like St. Louis, where so much is (thankfully) changing, Akande-Bartsch, president and CEO of FOCUS St. Louis, helps train future leaders and educates them on civic issues. After going through FOCUS programs, graduates report feeling a greater responsibility for the success of the city. *focus-stl.org.*

GLASER VS. GLASER

NIKKI GLASER

RESTLESS AND RAW, THE ST. LOUIS COMIC NIKKI GLASER CRAVES THE NATION'S ATTENTION— AND MAY SOMEDAY DECIDE SHE DESERVES IT.

BY NICHOLAS PHILLIPS

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If you went downtown on New Year's Eve and saw Nikki Glaser do standup for a sold-out, 3,100-seat Stifel Theatre, be apprised: She didn't see you. She blurs her vision while onstage. Avoiding eye contact with the audience, she says, ensures she won't see anyone who's not laughing. That makes her sound insecure. She certainly can be. You wouldn't have guessed it that evening from her swagger in knee-high stiletto boots and a dark, strapless getup; nor from her relentless nasal patter about ejaculation, suicide, and her vulva, which for a while during the pandemic had only a partial electrolysis treatment and so looked "patchy [and] steadfast... like a South American soccer field," she joked at one point, to big laughs; nor would you have guessed it from her belting out of spoof songs, or her obvious mastery of her craft. But put aside for a moment the financial perks of performing, which are considerable—she now plays to theaters in the U.S. and Europe, has her second HBO comedy special in the works, and is producing/hosting two reality shows this summer for The CW Network. A central reason that Glaser, a 39-year-old Des Peres native, has been going on stage and screen for two decades is precisely that she has an oceanic need for attention and validation yet sometimes doubts that she deserves either. Performing is a chance to prove those doubts wrong. At least, such is the game that, until recently, she thought she was playing.

Hours before the Stifel show, Glaser steps into the theater's side entrance with her dad, E.J. Glaser, and a pink welt on her forehead—the result of a mishap while helping him lift bags into their car. (Her dad is a retired Charter marketing exec who still lives in Des Peres and whose band, Glaze and the Moonkings, plays around town. He would later join her onstage with his guitar to play a duet, set to the tune of Lady Gaga's "Shallow," about the fact that Nikki had briefly moved back in with her parents early in the pandemic, hence her line, "This song's off the deep end / Where did we go wrong / I want us to get along," and his response, "It's too late for that now / I'm kicking you out now / and I'm gonna bang your mom.") As father and daughter find their way to dressing rooms, a Stifel staffer finds a Band-Aid and brings it to Nikki. "Thank you so much!" she gushes. "Is it cute? I mean my wound."

Glaser has nearly collapsed her public and private personalities into one, according to those who know her best. Kerstin Robertson, who's been tight with Glaser since fourth grade, says that listening to *The Nikki Glaser Podcast*, for example, is "like hearing a long voice memo from a friend. It's crazy how open and normal she is with all these people." She has made a career, in fact, out of graphic yarns about her body and her sex life—all of them basically true, Glaser says, and many involving her boyfriend, Chris Convy, who co-hosts *The Courtney Show* on 106.5 The Arch. (Their on-again-off-again romance was the main theme of her 2021 reality show *Welcome Home Nikki Glaser?* on E!) But on New Year's Eve, with a hometown crowd converging on the Stifel, she resolves to self-censor a bit.

"I don't want to embarrass Chris with any material," she mutters, seated in her dressing room, using a Sharpie to scribble joke cues on index cards. (This is pure ritual—she never ends up consulting the cards, she says, nor does she write out her jokes anymore; her act floats in her head.) "Even though [Chris] has never cared. He's always cool." Still, many loved ones plan to attend. She doesn't want to disappoint anyone.

"I just have to embrace that people are excited to see me, even though *I'm* not excited to see me," she says. "I don't even know how to put this hair in." She means hair extensions. They're but one piece of an elaborate regimen. Other pieces: fake eyelashes, spray tan, Botox, filler, laser facials, microneedling. Glaser both resents having to do all this and seems to revel in the outcome: Her Instagram account pops with shots of her looking like the hot influencer that, with more than a million followers, she is. She makes money off the anti-aging industry, too. One of her Insta reels is basically an ad for the anti-wrinkle injection Xeomin.

But whether she's propping up a harmful standard or taking an empowered cut of the action, one thing is certain: By the time she hits the Stifel stage, she's a spectacle—and immediately subverts it. Likening her physical appearance to "Owen Wilson after a suicide attempt," she shares: "People say to me, 'Nikki, you look so good, what are you talking about?' And I say"—she gestures to herself—"'This is all a lie.'" She's only hot, she explains, because she has money to spend on her regimen.

To be famous, she tells her fans in the crowd (the most devoted of whom she likes to refer to as "besties"), you can lack beauty or you can lack talent, but you can't lack both. Would anyone know Adele's name, Glaser asks the crowd, if Adele had the talents of Gigi Hadid, whose talents consists of "having rich parents" and "looking like a shiny, wet sphinx?" Of course not, said Glaser: "I'd like to be fat someday and have a career, but I don't think I would, because if you're fat, you'd better be a talented motherf—er." Her unspoken point: She isn't one.

Not to say she's a delicate flower. Standup demands a robust ego, and Glaser has that. But despite drawing praise over the years from her biggest influences (Sarah Silverman, Conan O'Brien, Jerry Seinfeld), from veterans and peers (Marc Maron, Joe Rogan, Mike Birbiglia), and from up-and-comers (Ginny Hogan, Isabel Hagen), Glaser does suffer steep dips in self-regard. At the same time, the software in her head appears to be updating these days, according to interviews we did at the Starbucks near her apartment in the Central West End. She has recently come around to the view that validation by others is not merely a short-term fix. It's also a sham, because the famous (including her) neither earn nor deserve their fame. They just get lucky, through nature or nurture or both. Even hardworking celebrities who make good choices, Glaser believes, have lucked into the ability to work hard and choose wisely. To her, it's luck all the way down.

This philosophy has left her in a volatile spot. On stage, she now fumes at the absurdity of celebrity, taking a jackhammer to the very hill she has so long sought to climb. But her new way of thinking has also been a weird sort of balm. It has cooled some of the jealousy that boils her insides. It has, in addition, allowed her to have a little empathy for herself. And for those whose brains go to far darker places.

***The Comedy Central** Roast of Alec Baldwin*, which aired in September 2019, wasn't Glaser's first roast, but it was her most savage. Gleaming in a one-shoulder white dress, she told Baldwin, "I read your memoir and saw that you considered suicide, and that meant a lot to me, because I have also considered…your suicide. And I have some ideas." She told Robert De Niro that he looked like Alf and that she felt honored to share the stage with him, "and by 'this stage,' I mean the final one of your life."

To Caitlyn Jenner, Glaser said, "You're a Republican. I don't know why. You've already gained control over a woman's body. What does that party have to do to lose your support, be your son?" And to Blake Griffin, the biracial Boston Celtics player, she said, "You look like a Black guy that got made by a printer running out of ink."

Then Griffin took the podium. "Nikki, look at ya, you damaged little climber," he said, joking that she resembled Larry Bird and adding: "The only difference between Larry Bird and Nikki Glaser is that Larry could actually pass as 33." Glaser's jaw dropped and she chuckled out: "Dev-a-stat-ing!"

Days later, Glaser was a guest on the podcast *Conan O'Brien Needs a Friend*. She confessed that the wisecracks about her looks from Griffin and others had stung. O'Brien suggested to her that the roasters had been aping Glaser's own self-deprecating jokes and probably didn't think they were getting under her skin, but he empathized with her hurt feelings, then pointed out: "You're doing these roasts, so some of that's on you!"

“I know,” she said, “I need to stop doing them.”

In Glaser’s telling, her looks were a big reason that she got into comedy. She jokes about being “diagnosed as an ugly child by a caricature artist at Six Flags,” and says she craved the attention bestowed on her pretty younger sister, Lauren. Glaser was wackily funny within her friend group, Robertson recalls, and dabbled in theater, but she wasn’t the class clown: At Kirkwood High School, Glaser quaked at giving class presentations, and in social situations, would stand apart from the boys, arms crossed.

Toward the end of her senior year, Glaser went on a diet, lost some weight, got compliments—then almost stopped eating altogether. By the summer, her heart rate had fallen so low that she was forced to get in-patient treatment. “It was a scary time,” recalls her sister. “We were definitely worried about her.” Anorexia followed Glaser to the University of Colorado–Boulder, then to the University of Kansas, where she transferred her sophomore year. “We’d be out in public and people would stare because she was visibly sick,” recalls Robertson, who also attended KU and roomed with Glaser. But Robertson noticed something else: Glaser was watching a heavy dose of *Late Night with Conan O’Brien*.

An obsessive fan of *Friends* and *Seinfeld,* Glaser felt a calling to be on TV but doubted she had the face or the acting chops. So when friends suggested she try standup, she began writing jokes. She dissected O’Brien’s book, *In the Year 2000*, and devoured the oeuvre of Sarah Silverman, who in Glaser’s mind proved that you could be candid, wretched, *and* endearing. She started showing up at open mics in Kansas City and, on trips home, at the Funny Bone in Westport.

“It is incredibly hard to write a well-structured joke, and she understood structure very, very quickly,” recalls Greg Warren, a veteran road comic based in St. Louis. Glaser was still a college student when, in 2006, she advanced to the finals of the show *Last Comic Standing*, and the following year, scored a spot on the prestigious list of promising newcomers at the Just for Laughs festival in Montreal. (During one set she did to prepare, she says, she fainted onstage because she hadn’t eaten.) In 2009, at the age of 24, she did a set on *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*. “She had some early TV exposure and some heat,” says Warren, “and she’d be like, ‘I want to headline this club.’ And I’d say, ‘You don’t have the time yet.’ Because 98 percent of people who do that fail miserably, and it really hurts them. But she’d say, ‘I’ll figure it out.’ And she would.” Her youth and attractiveness didn’t hurt, Warren adds, but the industry was right to notice her “because she always stepped up.”

But soon, Glaser was living in New York and unhappy. The careers of certain friends, including Amy Schumer, were taking off in a way that hers hadn’t, and Glaser says she would often drink until she’d black out and hook up with guys she didn’t really like. So in 2011, she went sober. This led, she has said, to a ramp-up in her eating disorder, which morphed into bingeing, and then bulimia. “I was getting mouth acne from throwing up and always had sores that I would pick at,” she would later write on *The Cut*. In her 30s, as her career did gain steam and she landed gigs on major cable networks and streaming services, fad diets such as intermittent fasting and Glaser’s decision to go vegan (which she still is today) provided a façade behind which she could binge unnoticed.

One night in January 2020, while lying in bed, Glaser—like countless other Swifties—eagerly hit the play button on the trailer to *Miss Americana*, a Netflix documentary about Taylor Swift. But Glaser dropped her phone in horror: It turned out that the comedian herself was in the documentary. During a montage of people criticizing the singer, Glaser is shown to have said in an interview years earlier: “She’s too skinny; it bothers me… all of her model friends, and it’s just like, c’mon!”

Glaser posted on Instagram a photo of herself in a Swift T-shirt. “It’s insanely ironic,” she wrote, “because anyone who knows me knows I’m obnoxiously obsessed with her and her music.… I was probably ‘feeling fat’ that day and was jealous. Also, I’ve had people say the same shit about me being too skinny before and know how terrible it feels… And I was only bothered by her model friends because I’d like to be her friend and I’m not a model.” Swift replied, “Wow.” She accepted the apology and added: “I’m so sorry to hear that you’ve struggled with some of the same things I’ve struggled with. Sending a massive hug.”

When the pandemic hit weeks later, Glaser says, she made the decision to temporarily move back in with her parents, in part out of fear of being alone and bingeing. That same month, she enrolled in a 12-step eating-disorder program and says that since then she has reached a much better place.

“Stand-up used to feel similar to dieting for me because the rewards are blissful but it’s incredibly punitive along the way,” she wrote in *The Cut*. “My goals with stand-up are different now; I don’t get that high from laughter anymore. It isn’t about *Wow, you like me!* so much as *I hope you enjoy yourself, but if you don’t, I won’t take it personally.*”

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GLASER
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Glaser once joked that her hobbies are "depression, naps, and Froyo," but don't be confused about her professional energy: She's game to do all kinds of appearances. In November, she served as grand marshal of the Thanksgiving parade here in town and sang the national anthem. She has done game shows (e.g., *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*), talk shows (e.g., *The View* and a guest-host spot on *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*), innumerable podcasts (from *The Joe Rogan Experience* to *Girls Gotta Eat*), satellite radio shows (Howard Stern's), the aforementioned roasts (of Baldwin, Bruce Willis, and Rob Lowe), reality shows (e.g., *The Masked Singer* and *Dancing with the Stars*). The reality show that she herself has hosted on HBO is *FBoy Island*. Its premise: Three women being courted by a pack of dudes must try to sort out which are "nice guys" and which are "fboys." (The "f" does not stand for "focused on philandering," but that's the gist). Several mainstream critics got a kick out of it. "The thrill of the series," wrote one critic in *The New York Times*, "is that it is well aware of its own absurdity." (Glaser is scheduled to host and co-produce a third season this summer for The CW, plus a spin-off, *FGirl Island*.)

Glaser's bread and butter, though, is standup. O'Brien lauded her craftmanship when she appeared on his podcast, recalling how she had come on his TV show in 2018 and "punched a hole in late night at the time" by describing her vagina as looking like "a hastily packed suitcase." "It was such great writing," O'Brien recalled. Not only did it show how to do blue material with intelligence, he said, but also brought some parity to a male-dominated comedy landscape littered with penis jokes. "It really reverberated," he said. (To which Glaser replied, "Well also, my vagina does reverberate." O'Brien: "Congratulations?")

To watch Glaser's catalog of standup specials—from *Perfect* on Comedy Central to *Bangin'* on Netflix to the most recent, *Good Clean Filth* on HBO—is to witness a style in evolution: Whereas she used to perform distinct jokes, she now unspools funny stories and asides as if chatting with intimates. Ginny Hogan, a young comic in New York who looks up to Glaser, has noticed this. "Sometimes comics make you feel like they're trying to outsmart you," she says. "What Nikki does is even smarter, because she makes you feel let in on the conversation." That conversation is usually sex-focused. In *Good Clean Filth*, Glaser acknowledged the "philosophers" on Reddit who accuse female comics of scoring easy laughs with sexual shock humor. But she defended her brand of comedy as essential. "Sex ed is garbage," she said. "Girls go into sexual encounters knowing really nothing because no one is telling them honestly what happens."

Honesty is another recurring theme in Glaser's recent standup, and more and more, she inflects such bits with an emotion rarely seen in her earlier work: rage. Her most animated moment in *Good Clean Filth* (and maybe across all her specials) comes when she rails at middle-aged men who insist that their much younger girlfriends have old souls. "I don't know what happened, but there is an *epidemic* of old souls among 20-somethings right now, according to all my 40-year-old friends," she complains, building up to some Sam Kinison–grade shouts: "You like her because she's HOT AND YOUNG!... You don't have to lie and say they have old souls! THEY DON'T HAVE OLD SOULS! A few of them do. I know a couple that actually do have old souls. *Because something traumatic happened to them*. And they need to go heal from it. They don't need to go be humped by you and your old body!" The crowd cheered.

Part of Glaser's anger during the bit was a jealousy toward beautiful young women—a jealousy that she openly admits on- and off-stage. Meanwhile, in her personal life, she and Convy have long vacillated about staying together. Glaser's sister, Lauren, leans toward the belief that what Nikki wants most in life right now is a stable, loving relationship yet "always goes back and forth on whether she wants marriage or kids." (Convy did not respond to interview requests, but he addressed that very topic on Glaser's E! show, emphasizing at one point: "Nikki is *all over the place*.")

Glaser's feelings of jealousy also extend to other comics. David Spade, her friend, is effortlessly funny, she claims, whereas she herself is not. For a while, Glaser couldn't even watch John Mulaney, who's a fellow Midwesterner by birth and about the same age. They're not quite in the same lane—

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he's a generalist, while her act is more niche. (She aspires to be, she says, the Phoebe Bridgers of comics, not the Taylor Swift.) Still, she has despaired that she'll never have Mulaney's skill. Or that maybe she could have it, but she's too lazy—letting a B-joke remain mediocre instead of spending 30 seconds to lift it to an A+. Or that maybe such laziness is really, at bottom, a fear of trying to reach her potential, because to even try would open up the possibility that she's already reached it. Welcome to Nikki Glaser's brain.

Such insecurity infuses her style: The merciless pace of her act, she says, deprives fans of any time to think, *That wasn't funny.* O'Brien told her on his podcast, "You can breathe into it more because you've earned the right.... You've paid your dues. And you're really funny." But she explains away his encouragement. As a late-night host, she tells me, O'Brien had to be nice to people he didn't hold in high esteem.

Glaser had to work harder to discount recent praise from Seinfeld. The two comedians played in separate rooms at the Borgata Casino in Atlantic City on December 10. After the shows, he sent word that he wanted to meet her, according to Glaser and her frequent opener Anya Marina, who witnessed the encounter. A staffer escorted them to Seinfeld's green room, telling them on the way: *Jerry never does this.* When Glaser arrived, Seinfeld gushed with so much admiration for her work, including all her "YouTubes," that at first she mistook it for a bit. (Fans of his show *Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee* know he's not effusive with praise.) But then she realized it was sincere and teared up.

She told me this story a few weeks afterward, presenting it as a pivot point in her life. "I can question anyone else thinking I'm funny—my parents, my fans, even crowds of people cheering for me after a show. They can all be wrong. Jerry Seinfeld is not a liar. He just wouldn't do that. So now I just don't have the ability to go, 'I'm not funny.'" (He had also apparently asked whether she was Jewish, and upon learning that she wasn't, he disagreed, deciding: "You are." Glaser's conclusion: The only way you can be Jewish is if your mom is Jewish or Jerry Seinfeld declares that you are.)

Yet when Glaser met me again in March, the high had evaporated. "I'm feeling that fraud thing bubbling up again a lot," she said, having rescheduled our interview from the previous day because of a bout of depression. "I think I need a new person to validate that I'm funny."

Glaser recognizes—intellectually, at least—that she's sprinting after a mirage. Her days on the stage, and on this earth, are numbered. She may yet live to see her star in the Delmar Loop sidewalk, she says. But eventually, passersby will have to Google her. Paul Newman, once a revered actor, is now, to young people, just the salad dressing guy. "Everyone will be forgotten one day, is my point," she says, "and I will just be dust."

She's also been working through (and maybe adopting) the concept that she didn't earn the talent for which she seeks approval. The underlying idea, fleshed out by the public intellectual Sam Harris and others, is that free will is an illusion. "We're all so obsessed with status and ourselves and our ego that we can't possibly think, 'I had nothing to do with my success,'" Glaser says. "But I really didn't. I'm just a big bag of cells and neurons firing off that I really have no control over." Some folks take umbrage at this notion, she observes; she herself has found it freeing—from jealousy, for example—and also fruitful for standup.

At the Stifel, she told a story about being at her sister's house and wanting to take a shower. Her toddler nephew (adorably) volunteered to join her. Glaser didn't want the hassle, so she asked her sister in a creepy voice: "What if I molest him?" Her sister asked, "Would you?" Glaser said, "I don't know!" Her story continued:

> Of course I was joking, but if I'm being serious, I *don't* know. Do *you* know? Have you run through your head, *Am I a pedophile*? I know that I'm not attracted to kids, but no one wants to be one. What if it just happens one day because the setting is right and you're like, "This is my thing!" .... Think of how many things are inside you, just talents or things you're into, and you wouldn't know it unless you played that instrument or whatever? Do you think we'd know Paul McCartney—would he be a Beatle—if he was never given a guitar?

Her point was not to condone molestation. She'd prefaced this bit with another about her admiration for the grit of victim-survivors. They should get to board planes before veterans, she told the audience, and should never feel ashamed or stigmatized by what happened to them. (In fact, she considers it her "duty as a comedian" to break the taboos around discussing molestation, which she says is a massive societal problem.)

Her point, rather, was to invite the audience to consider that they don't get to choose their thoughts—and therefore, could feel empathy for fellow humans who think awful ones. (Her premise has support among researchers, by the way; the director of the Sexual Behavior Consultation Unit at Johns Hopkins Medicine recently told *The New York Times*, "People don't choose what arouses them—they discover it. No one grows up wanting to be a pedophile.")

In May, during a show in Vienna, she drove home her point by closing the bit this way: "You can't trust your brain! I get suicidally depressed sometimes. Do you think if I could choose what I thought, I'd want to kill myself?" She can't own a gun, she explained, because she can't trust herself to do the right thing with it. "Even though I would never want to use that gun"—she paused slightly—"to make my nephew have sex with me..." Raucous laughter cut her off.

This will be the material that gets the most buzz when her HBO special drops next year, she predicts. A well-known male comedian who heard the bit commented to her that only a female comedian could get away with it. "All that told me," she says, "was that he was jealous of the joke. And that made me so happy." A happiness, of course, she did not choose. ■

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Seeing Stars

"A Star Is Born." That was the headline when Jayson Christopher Tatum made the cover of *St. Louis Family* nine years ago, while still a 17-year-old junior at Chaminade College Preparatory School. Granted, he already had a YouTube highlight reel and was considered the nation's No. 1 high school basketball player for his graduating class. "I always remind him we are not going to stop right here," his father, Justin Tatum, said at the time. "This is not all there is." Prescient. The Boston Celtics selected him third overall in the draft, following a year at Duke. After leading the team to the NBA Finals in 2022, Tatum has continued to dazzle this year, being named the NBA All-Star Game MVP and scoring a record-setting 51 points in Game 7 of the Eastern Conference semifinals. And that's not to mention life beyond the court. Yes, he reps Gatorade and Nike, but he also remembers his hometown, with his eponymous foundation supporting future generations. And speaking of, he shares a name and the spotlight with his 5-year-old son, nicknamed "Deuce," who's already a star in his own right.

***ST. LOUIS MAGAZINE*, VOL. 29, ISSUE 7** (ISSN 1090-5723) is published monthly by St. Louis Magazine LLC, P.O. Box 191606, St. Louis, MO 63119. Change of address: Please send new address and old address label and allow 6 to 8 weeks for change. Send all remittances and requests to St. Louis Magazine, P.O. Box 191606, St. Louis, MO 63119. Periodicals postage paid at St. Louis, MO, and additional mailing office. Postmaster: Send address changes to St. Louis Magazine, P.O. BOX 191606, St. Louis, MO 63119.

Photography by **Kevin A. Roberts**

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